Spring 5-2014

Exploring the Multiple Dimensions of Intelligence Identity in High-Achieving Students

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by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Professor Stephanie Bondi

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2014

Exploring the Multiple Dimensions of Intelligence Identity in High-Achieving Students

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University of Nebraska, 2014

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The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the important elements reported by second-year undergraduates at Midwestern University (MU) as they renegotiated their intelligence identity of being the smart one. The five participants were members of the 2012-2013 first-year cohort of Jumpstart Business Community (JBC). Per inclusion in JBC, the students identified as high-achieving students and/or were classified as accelerated learners in high school. The reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity from Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) informed this study in the examination of renegotiation of the intelligence identity.

The main research question of this study was what are the important elements reported by second-year undergraduates formerly labeled as the smart one in high school in managing their multiple identities once transitioned into higher education at a research intensive institution's business college? This was divided into four sub-questions: (a) How do participants report the salience of their intelligence level within their self-image in higher education versus earlier in their lives? (b) What roles do participants report their social partners (i.e., family, friends, and classmates) play in their self-perception of high intelligence? (c) What roles do participants report their groups of affiliation (e.g., academically related activities, non-academic activities, learning communities, etc.) play

in the saliency of the label of intelligence? (d) How does the process of talking about the self-label of high intelligence affect participants' identity?

The findings of this study inform higher education professionals practice around incorporation of students' definition of identity and success in college. This research study attempted to add to a relatively unexplored body of literature around the effect of the transition to college on the intelligence identity of high-achieving students. This exploratory study provides recommendations for practice as well as recommendations for future research. Through examination of how to better support this population of students, educators may be able to challenge these students to meet their high potential.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, thank you to the five curious students who volunteered for this research study. Literally, this paper would not be the same without you and I appreciate your openness, candor, and courage to share your experiences with me. Similarly, this thesis would not have come to fruition without all two dozen of the students in the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 cohorts of "Jumpstart Business Community." My hope is that you find validation in the contents of this study and that if you disagree with my findings you challenge me so that I can continue to develop this research.

I must thank my advisor, Dr. Stephanie Bondi, for your feedback and suggestions along the way. From the excited brainstorm which led to my theoretical framework to your dedicated presence at my thesis defense only six days postpartum, you have been committed to seeing this through from beginning to end.

Thank you also to Dr. Deb Mullen and Dr. Tim Alvarez for being mentors and supporters through these last two years... and for signing off on this thesis as part of my thesis committee.

To my accountabilibuddies, especially Steph, Adam, and Ashley: thanks for the pep talks, caffeine, and positive peer pressure to focus. This paper would have been far lonelier to write without your company.

To Lauren, Paula & Molly: thank you for being great friend-colleagues who managed to find the best in me, even when you could never find anything on my messy desk.

To Rachel, Katie, Sarah, Jeannine, and Roxanne: thank you for supporting me emotionally and professionally as I spent far too many hours in the office working on this thesis... even before I actually worked in your office. You have made me feel welcome, wanted, and I will miss you all very much!

Oh, and those darling folks who love me no matter what! Thank you, Mom and Dad, for teaching me to "read" encyclopedias as a preschooler and that it was okay to be on academic quiz bowl instead of sports. That nerdiness really comes in handy when building connections with my participants.

My best buddy for life, Mike: thanks for convincing me moving to Nebraska for graduate school would be an "adventure" and relocating to support me emotionally (and financially). Now that this paper is done, I guess I have to start doing more dishes, huh?

Finally, to those who challenged me over these last two years and filled me with doubt: success feels even better for triumphing over those obstacles you put in my way, but when I decide to do a PhD, can you stay away?

Thanks.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The transition to college is a popular topic in the literature as it relates to not only student success, but also reflects on the success of the institution toward its mission for retention and graduation rates. At this time, extensive research exists on the experiences of university-level honors students as they transition to and aim to excel at college (Campbell & Fuqua, 2008; Hertzog, 2003; Riek, 2009; Shushok, 2002; Siegle, Rubenstein, Pollard & Romey, 2010). Students who have been labeled as accelerated learners with above-average skills and/or intelligence tend toward certain problematic characteristics like perfectionism (Luycks, Soenens, Goossens, Beckx, & Wouters, 2008), dependence on parents' expectations for motivation (Garces-Bacsal, 2010), and social difficulties with peers (Wellisch & Brown, 2012). Yet, the community of an honors program can mediate some of the social, emotional, and academic needs of this population (Bednar, 1965; Hebert & McBee, 2007).

The identity development of students as they transition from high school to higher education has not been addressed in depth in the literature. Of interest to higher education professionals, students who struggle through identity development related to their intelligence may fail to achieve satisfactory academic progress and/or fail to engage with the campus community. Astin's (1999) student development theory suggested that without engagement with the academic and social experience, students may not be successful. This current study aims to explore the renegotiation of the students' identity around intelligence as they transition to higher education to better understand the support they need to succeed.

This study is informed by the model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) (Abes, Jones, & McEwen 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000), which states that the students' conception of who they are is based on interrelated constructs like sex, gender, race, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, social class, and culture. Jones and McEwen (2000) explained that "different dimensions of identity will be more or less important for each individual given a range of contextual influences" (p. 411). This study focuses on the perceived saliency of the label of being the smart one in the context of the students' additional identities. The process of answering questions about identity can be new to undergraduate students (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007); thus, the two-part interview method is used to build a learning partnership between the interviewer and participant and promote reflective practices (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007).

The model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) provides the theoretical framework for this study for its focus on the fluctuating saliency of different parts of each student's identity. The participants share the experience of taking accelerated courses in secondary education and entering college as traditional aged students (i.e., all were 17-18 years old on the first day of school). For various reasons discussed later, the transition into college and related identity negotiation may be experienced differently based on factors like achievement motivation (Zuo & Crammond, 2001), perfectionism (Luycks et. al, 2008), and intercultural maturity (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). By focusing on the students' self-reported identities and salient experiences, educators can better help them identify the pieces of their experience which are causing dissonance in this new environment in order to facilitate positive development.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the important elements in identity negotiation of those who have been labeled the smart one in high school. This study included those who were part of an accelerated learning program within secondary education, yet during college participated in a second tier academic program since they were originally not accepted to the top tier university honors program. This particular population was chosen for this study because I anticipated their experiences of transition from being labeled high intelligence to not being accepted into the honors program would provide rich data for this study. Participants were selected from the Jumpstart Business Community (JBC) of the 2012-2013 academic year from one Midwestern public, research institution. These students were invited to join the learning community due to high academic achievement (high ACT scores, as well as honors, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate courses in high school) and because they were not initially accepted to the honors program. After students agreed to participate in the study, it was discovered some JBC students had also been invited to the university honors program. This is discussed more in Chapter 3.

Qualitative Design

Phenomenological research involves gathering information from participants' lived experiences around a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). The description of findings consisted of the essence of experiences from several individuals in order to understand the emerging patterns within the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). To this end, Creswell (2014) states that the researcher is one of the major tools of interpretation and the relationship built with the individual participants alters the data gathered. The former

mentor/student relationship between the participants and this researcher facilitated the conversations within the interviews of this study due to established rapport. A phenomenological design for this study consisted of semi-structured interviews which allowed for conversation about the experience of being or not being labeled the smart one in academic and social situations.

Creswell (2014) defined the constructivist worldview as holding that individuals' social and historical experiences influence their interpretation of the world. A research study from the constructivist view includes open-ended questions to invite individual interpretations of their own experiences and definition of importance to share in the study (Creswell, 2014). To this end, both interview protocols in this study followed a semi-structured design with room for personal definitions for every key term. Interpretation of data was primarily inductive as the researcher built meaning from the data collected. By listening to these accounts, the researcher was able to provide voice for the patterns of experiences within the phenomenon of adjusting one's self-identity after the change in the label of being the smart one.

Research Questions

One main research question guides this study. What are the important elements reported by second-year undergraduates formerly labeled as the smart one in high school in managing their multiple identities once transitioned into higher education at a research intensive institution's business college? This question is broken down into four sub-questions: (a) How do participants report the salience of their intelligence level within their self-image in higher education versus earlier in their lives? (b) What roles do participants report their social partners (i.e., family, friends, and classmates) play in their

self-perception of high intelligence? (c) What roles do participants report their groups of affiliation (e.g., academically related activities, non-academic activities, learning communities, etc.) play in the saliency of the label of intelligence? (d) How does the process of talking about the self-label of high intelligence affect participants' identity?

These research questions were addressed through two, semi-structured interviews. The first interview focused on the first research question and three sub-questions. Students reflected on their label of high intelligence and explored how being smart affected their experiences in high school and transition into college. The second interview addressed the fourth research sub-question. It followed up on the process of reflection on their intelligence identity and allowed room for additional information to be shared on the first three sub-questions.

Significance

These participants were in accelerated learning programs within secondary education; research on this population of students suggests the need for teacher training and specialization for their unique social and cognitive needs (Peterson, 2002). Research on students in a baccalaureate honors program also suggests that this attention to their intellectual and social stimulation mitigates the transition into college. The deficiency in the literature lies with understanding the factors that shape students' intelligence identity development during this significant transition.

During the transition to higher education, students may experience difficulty adjusting to the college course load as well as challenges relating to peers unless supports to negotiate intelligence identity are identified and accessible. If educators are not

prepared to support development of intelligence identity, they may be sacrificing the potential of students who have intelligence as a salient identity.

Definition of Terms

Accelerated learners/high-achieving students. The terms "accelerated learner" and "high-achieving student" are used interchangeably in this study to reflect the literature on this population. This is the external label on the individuals who held or hold membership in groups like honors-level, Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate high school courses and/or university honors designation.

Being the smart one. In this study, I use this term to refer to the internal label of high intelligence determined by the individual based on academic, social, and other factors. I posed interview questions to participants using the language "being the smart one."

Jumpstart Business Community. A live-in learning community at Midwestern University composed of first-year students accepted to and enrolled in the College of Business. Students were recruited to the community by invitation-only on the basis of ACT score of 24 or higher. It was expected based on selection progress that JBC students were not in the honors program.

Delimitations

Recruitment for this study was limited to the twenty students of the Jumpstart Business Community (JBC), which was created through invitation based on acceptance to Midwestern University's (MU) College of Business and an ACT score of 24 or higher. JBC invited the top students from those who had applied to the general business learning community to join a brand-new learning community, focused specifically on continued

success in college and beyond. MU is a predominantly White institution and most of the 20 students in Jumpstart Business Community identified as White and were traditional-aged students. Information on family socioeconomic status was not gathered, yet all participants are privileged by educational level. None of the participants in this study were first-generation college students and several of their parents earned advanced degrees.

Limitations

The principal investigator recruited participants through the roster of the 2012-2013 Jumpstart Business Community through emails. Participants volunteered by responding to the email or its follow-up several weeks later. No information is known about the population of students who did not volunteer to participate, yet through my involvement with JBC as a course instructor, it is my perception that the students who chose to participate in this study are also those who most participated in the course**.** This study perhaps excludes the perspectives of less involved students. The participation in the Jumpstart Business Community may also have changed the experience for students formerly labeled accelerated learners transitioning to college. Students who do not hold membership in such an organization may experience different effects to their self-perception of high intelligence since community inclusion in JBC may have mitigated negative effects of the change in the external label of accelerated learner.

Assumptions

I approached the study with the assumption that students formerly labeled accelerated learners place high salience on their identity as the smart one. Additionally, they likely renegotiate their identity as the smart one when transitioning to higher

education, especially if their identity has been called into question by being involved in a second-tier academic program instead of the university's top tier honors program. This belief was created through interactions with the Jumpstart Business Community during their first year on-campus during my teaching and mentoring roles. The current cohort (2013-2014) of Jumpstart Business Community students have, in my observation, displayed similar behaviors and voiced concerns which support this assumption.

Conclusion

This study explores the self-reported important elements of the 2012-2013 cohort of students from JBC as they negotiated the saliency of their identities transitioning into college, specifically around the identity of being the smart one. These students were recognized in high school for their intelligence through inclusion in accelerated coursework and/or programming for advanced learners. JBC focused on continuation of that high achievement in college as a middle area between the honors program and the general student population. The intent was to better understand the elements of the smart identity renegotiation in order to better support students' needs. The next chapter provides contextual information on relevant areas of literature.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

What Is Giftedness in Children?

Giftedness is the term used in K-12 literature to refer to the population of students who are high-achieving or accelerated learners in K-12 education. That term is not as widely used in higher education literature; instead, the population is referred to as honors (when members of the university program), high-achieving students or accelerated learners. In order to understand what may have been these students' experiences before attending college, this section provides contextual information on the foundation of giftedness literature.

Hughes and Converse (1962) outlined three main questions which continue to influence research around gifted education, now fifty years later: "What criteria should be used to identify the gifted? What are the characteristics of the gifted? How should the gifted be educated?" (p. 179). The purpose of this present study is to explore the experiences of students who may have met the criteria of giftedness in high school and now may renegotiate their intelligence identity in the transition to college.

In their examination of the underrepresentation of gifted African American males in high school, Bonner, Jennings, Marbley, and Brown (2008) noted how the definition of giftedness is problematically complex due to its reliance on the cultural context of the student. In this way, "an unfortunate outcome of our truncated views regarding the necessary and sufficient attributes to be identified as gifted is that they create a template that all children do not fit neatly" (Bonner, Jennings, Marbley, & Brown, 2008, p. 94).

Although much of the foundational research on giftedness focused almost exclusively on Western cultural definitions, additional impactful studies have been performed over the last few decades in other cultures. Yakmaci-Guzel and Akarsu (2006) compared the level of overexcitability in gifted and non-gifted 10th grade students in Turkey. They found that students with "high motivation also had higher imaginational and intellectual overexcitability scores than the group having low motivation" (p. 52). This same relationship existed between groups of high and low leadership ability. In combination with "intellectual ability, motivation, creativity, [and] leadership" as known contributors to giftedness, over-excitability appeared to have a positive relationship with giftedness, especially in those who were also highly creative (Yamaci-Guzel & Akarsu, 2006, p. 54). This overexcitability measure may also be reflected in level of participation in the Jumpstart Business Community as its emphasis on networking with others may have challenged those who had low overexcitability measures.

Wellisch and Brown (2012) summarized the literature on gifted children by identifying three key proponents of achievement for gifted children: good socio-emotional adjustment, positive achievement motivation, and high ability. Therefore, if a gifted child begins to underachieve, the student "can be expected to struggle with adjustment and motivation and an eventual loss of ability" (p. 150). This prognosis may seem dire, yet the argument made is that educators should assess and identify underachievement before loss of potential success. This leads to a central question of this study. Do the students in JBC who may be negotiating changes in their smartness identity have supports to avoid loss of potential?

Characteristics of Gifted Youth

In the single-subject study of gifted youth conducted by Walsh and Kemp (2013), the potentially gifted child rose to the expectation of providing sophisticated responses to sophisticated questions. Walsh and Kemp described:

> Rose gave relatively uncomplicated and direct answers when the lower level questions were asked. It was not until questions of a more complex nature were asked that she was able to demonstrate fully her verbal and cognitive abilities. One could argue, therefore, that for a young child of Rose's ability, higher order questioning is useful not only in enabling the child to demonstrate more sophisticated skills but also in providing an opportunity for further developing intellectual thinking. (p. 117)

As expressed in the above quote, educators cannot understand gifted children's full potential until they provide them opportunities to meet challenges. The challenges posed at Rose were catalysts for development. Walsh and Kemp (2013) explored the higher order thinking of one student, identified as advanced and nominated for participation by the director of her daycare and verified as gifted by various instruments. Rose's demographic information was not disclosed in the report, yet she is described as the daughter of two individuals with PhDs and English was her first and only language.

These general demographics are common across most of the participants in this present study. All but one had at least one parent with an advanced degree. All but one (different student) spoke English as the first and only language. In the context of Walsh and Kemp (2013), each student met the challenges set for them throughout K-12 education, yet now may no longer receive the catalysts for development without the external label of accelerated learner.

Garces-Bacsal (2010) explored the socio-affective experiences of gifted children from different cultural backgrounds than many studies (i.e. Western cultures) using the

Philippine Thematic Apperception Test (PTAT) with Filipino students aged between four and nine years from one private school and one public school settings. The authors conducted this study using storytelling. The data centered on "their own fields of experience: their perceptions on school and education, their ideas regarding family relationships, peer interactions, and spirituality concerns" and in this way, the students were "able to paint an even substantive and deeper portrait of what their private worlds were like, through the tales they wove." (p. 142).

Self-narratives from gifted youth demonstrate the strong role family may play on the motivation toward achievement; when helping a student navigate her or his talents, a counselor or educator should be aware of the previously reinforced need to please elders and make loved ones proud of them (Garces-Bacsal, 2010, p. 148). This allegiance to familial narrative surrounding their intelligence status is framed in other literature in terms of parental attachment (Wellisch, 2010) and the hereditary and learned nature of personality traits (Gockenbach, 1989), yet serves as an underlying force in future student success. Wellisch (2010) argued that babies who experience their needs routinely met are better able to persist when their needs are occasionally not met. As "an essential characteristic in the manifestation of potential and a factor in enduring practice to ensure achievement," persistence is one of the main identifiers of giftedness (p. 118). This literature suggests familial influence may be important in understanding identity and experiences which better informs this current study.

Gockenbach (1989) provided a review of the literature on personality factors of gifted students and their parents, the family environment, and sibling relations in order to better identify whether giftedness originates from interactions with others or innately by

genetics. The review of the literature found the correlation of parent characteristics and adolescent characteristics inconclusive as there were several different explanations: (a) gifted children shape parents' responses as certain techniques produce better results and these children enjoy these less negative interactions, leading to better rewards for both parties; (b) the parents are simply treating their children as they were once treated by their own parents; (c) the parents may themselves be gifted and have passed on these traits genetically (p. 211). The implications for future research and practice included the need for further exploration of dynamics among as many members of the family as possible to understand better the role of giftedness in a family structure (Gockenbach, 1989). This current study includes an emphasis on the participants' perception of their family's role in their intelligence identity in order to understand the stakeholders in their identity of being smart.

Though based on archival data, the populations sampled in Zuo and Cramond (2001) most closely resembled the sampling of this study. The purpose of their study was to see how well existing identity theories could be used to explain the differences among high-achieving and low-achieving gifted K-12 students, using Terman's groups A and C: group A being the high-achieving gifted and group C the low-achieving gifted. Zuo and Cramond used data from Terman's 1936 and 1940 follow-up studies in which he asked questions around the participants' occupational decisions. The results indicated that the majority of high-achievers were *identity achievers* whereas the majority of low-achievers were classified into the *diffusion* status (p. 254). This informed the current study in its attention to high- and low-achieving giftedness, reflected in the students who earned invitation to JBC yet not to the university honors program.

The largest implication from Zuo and Cramond (2001) as related to this study is that all of the participants were previously identified as gifted by their inclusion in Terman's original study, yet those in the low-achievement group were classified as lacking a clear sense of identity. The authors argued, "Given the significance of gifts and talents to the society and the association of identity formation and talent realization, it is highly desirable that gifted education give adequate attention to the research on identity and the facilitation of its development" (p. 255). By cultivating educators' understanding of smartness identity development, educators may be able to help students better harness their potential to our institutions, communities, and larger society. If educators do not harness students' potential in their identity of being the smart one, they may lose out on what these students could have achieved in the university and in society.

Characteristics of High-Achieving College Students

Next, a summary of literature is provided on giftedness in college in order to provide the known consequences of K-12 giftedness when these students go to college. Bratt (2010) argued that there is a disconnect among the pedagogical definition in K-12 for identifying giftedness by academic performance, the research characterization of giftedness based on multifaceted layers of intelligence, and "the tendency of colleges and universities to rank students on the basis of American College Test (ACT), Advanced Placement Test (AP) scores, or grade point averages" (p. 11). These disconnects in labeling may create disconnects in the students' understanding of their own identity when they do not align with all definitions of gifted within different contexts.

Wellisch and Brown (2012) discussed the faction of "gifted and misunderstood" students who may be "socially mismatched with same-aged peers when they should have

been grouped with mentally similar children" (p. 148). This lack of similarity may inhibit the social development, thus interdependent learning. Similarly, the Department of Special Services staff in Champaign, Illinois (1961) conducted a study of underachieving and overachieving gifted pupils. Their study found that creativity and a high degree of perceived peer acceptance related significantly to high educational achievement in the elementary grades (p. 172). These higher skills of self-expression and peer validation may encourage better performance on primary school success indicators.

As part of my university honors program, I completed an undergraduate thesis examining the persistence of honors students toward completion of the honors program requirements. Though unrelated in theoretical focus, the findings of that study do shape my expectations for these students' needs. I found that the level of participation in the university-level honors program initiatives did not lead to greater likelihood to complete an undergraduate thesis and graduate with honors designation. This may mean that other factors affected persistence and completion. In that study (Holland, 2012), I found that acceptance into the honors program created a continuation of intelligence identity status. "Honors adds an upper echelon for those like Greta who was 'in a bunch of Honors classes in high school and I've always been in the gifted program so I liked being 'higher up' I guess.' It is a continuation of status for the most academically motivated" (Holland, 2012, p. 22). This current study explored the implications on identity for those who are transitioning to college including whether they continue to hold this status for being one of the most academically motivated. Without this external label of giftedness, this study examined whether and how the identity around being smart changed.

Identity Development in College

As students develop over time, the issues they may experience change. Identity is a "developmental progression from simple, conferred ideas about oneself to more complex understandings of what makes up identity" (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 582). Historically, the term "stage" was used in the literature, yet this has been criticized for seeming too "rigid, stable, and defined externally to the individual" (Torres et al., 2009, p. 582); thus, the new term is *statuses* to account for internalized views of self. Identity is largely seen as defined and influenced by society. In this way, a person may undertake different developmental steps in varying order and even return to earlier statuses for reconstruction, often due to disequilibrium in the sense of self (Torres et al., 2009, p. 582). Also, the environment impacts development such that researchers must consider the context within which the student develops. Torres et al. (2009) described it as "an intricate web of unstated expectations on the individual. As society changes this web may expand or change, but it is always present" (p. 583). To better understand the unique needs of the students, educators must explore each student's web of identity.

High standards for academic performance in secondary education carry into the higher education environment where harsh expectations can result in an overdoing of self-criticism, thereby further limiting future potential for positive performance of expectations (Luycks et. al, 2008, p. 339). Luycks et al. (2008) defined perfectionism as "a dysfunctional characteristic creating vulnerability for maladjustment because such perfectionists tend to define their self-worth in terms of achieving these unrealistic standards" (p. 340). For students who previously were academically successful with lower levels of effort, failure to continue to perform at high achievement levels may

exacerbate previously latent or mild perfectionism. Literature on identity development suggests that the transition into college is a salient moment of malleability wherein students are susceptible to outside influences changing their internal loci. This study applied this finding to an unstudied population.

Self-Authorship

Research on self-authorship informed this study beyond that which has already been stated as the students' ability to describe their own identities is dependent on their maturity. Taylor (2008) sought to map the individual and environmental variables which affect the developmental trajectory of identity. Here focusing on the individual variables identified by Taylor, the first category, socially constructed identities, constitutes the *what* of identity and is widely researched for the effects of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, abilities, and so forth. The second category identified by Taylor, histories, provides an understanding of the *when*, including "prior academic performance, family background, awareness of and/or involvement with significant national events (e.g., 9/11), [and] experiences with oppression" (Taylor, 2008, p. 220). The third category, attributes/developmentally instigative characteristics, constitutes the personality and emotional markers such as "tendency to internalize negative messages from others, willingness (or unwillingness) to step beyond one's comfort zone, persistence in the face of challenges, self-confidence" and ultimately influencing *why* the person experienced the world as she or he did. Lastly, "Style of Knowing" tells us *how* the individual experiences the world: "Separate (i.e., doubting new ideas, even those that are appealing), connected (i.e., embracing new ideas, even those that seem wrong)" (Taylor, 2008, p. 220, emphasis in original). Ultimately, the individual's identity cannot

be traced to any one category, yet the integration of all of these pieces (what, when, why, and how) can better inform the who of the person's identity.

Focusing on Multiple Dimensions of Identity

Foundational work. Reynolds and Pope (1991) stated that existing identity development theories fail to be inclusive of and generalizable to culturally diverse groups, especially those with multiple layers of diversity. By peering at an individual's situation through the lenses of multiple identity labels, counselors decrease "the likelihood of misunderstanding or misinterpreting their clients' perspectives and actions" and increase their ability to recognize and combat internalized issues around identity/identities (Reynolds & Pope, 1991, p. 178). Failing to incorporate the unique perspective and experience of the student may jeopardize our communication to the student that she or he matters to the institution and miss the opportunity to connect the student to college. For the JBC students, the previously-reinforced identity of intelligence may not be rewarded in their college environment, especially if and when their course performance is less than their expectations. By understanding the student's viewpoint of their own intelligence identity, higher education professionals can better understand the impact of a dissonant experience on the student.

To support this goal of understanding students' views of themselves, Reynolds and Pope (1991) designed the multidimensional identity model with four options (i.e. statuses):

1) Identity with one aspect of self (society assigned - passive acceptance)
2) Identity with one aspect of self (conscious identification)
3) Identify with multiple aspects of self in a segmented fashion
4) Identify with combined aspects of self (identity intersection). (p. 179)

Each of these options for individuals afforded certain levels of integration of multiple, societally defined identities. Reynolds and Pope (1991) did not assign weight to one option over another, yet noted that this theory in practice may require retraining of the mind to not apply hierarchical value to one over others. The authors brought attention to the fact that "such tasks are not easy in a culture and profession that often implies and directly states that healthy development occurs only in a specific manner" (p. 179). For students who deviate from the norm and encounter unexpected challenges, the support strategies must be flexible to meet their needs.

Collier (2001) introduced the differentiated model of role identity acquisition as an expansion and alternative to the existing model. Burke's multilevel control system model had been limited to a primary identity around which any others revolved based on context. The differentiated model deviated from earlier literature by emphasizing that certain reference groups hold more impact than others and different individuals may enact different versions of the same role, based on their multiplicity of identities and greater context. Collier (2001) moved the emphasis from defining a person's collection of identities to allowing the person to prioritize which identity or identities are most salient. In this research, the researcher was careful not to assume any one of the student's self-reported identities would be most important as each participant could and did prioritize similar statuses differently based on their unique context.

King and Baxter Magolda (2005) expanded upon Kegan's (1994) model of lifespan development with an exploration of the implicit continuum of development with inclusion of two steps toward maturity, divided into initial, intermediate, and mature levels of development in the three main areas. Logically, the intermediate step serves as

a tension point between "externally derived sense of self (e.g., reliance upon affirmation by others or peer group acceptance) and an internally derived self-definition" (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005, p. 578). For students who experience this tension early and at high potency, the need for support and continued validation may be high. Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) supported this point with the assertion that although individuals with less complex meaning-making structures were unaware of the performance nature of displaying identity roles, "it was this unacknowledged performativity that lay beneath their attempts to fit into others' socially constituted expectations and navigate the resulting tensions and ambiguities associated with crossing multiple borders" (p. 14). By focusing on the individual's meaning-making processes, counselors may be better able to tailor assistance to specific issues, inclusive of intersecting identities.

The model of multiple dimensions of identity. The model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) is described as “a fluid and dynamic one, representing the ongoing construction of identities and the influence of changing contexts on the experience of identity development” (Jones & McEwen, 2000), p. 408). The MMDI differs from other theories in its focus on saliency shifts among different identities through the lens of context. The model "was informed by the work of social psychologist Deaux (1993), who distinguished between social identities (e.g., roles or membership categories) and personal identities (i.e., self-descriptive traits and behaviors) and described them as a fundamentally interrelated" (Jones, Kim, & Cilente Skendall, 2012, p. 701). Jones, Kim, and Cilente Skendall (2012) explained that the more salient the identity, the closer to the core sense of self for that individual. The authors argued that, “Identity salience shifts, given changing contexts such as family background, current

experiences, and sociocultural influences, [and are] all influenced by systems of privilege and oppression" (p. 701). Jones and McEwen (2000) emphasized that sociocultural conditions like sexism and racism change the focus of the person through attention on reflection and better understanding. In this way, those with dominant identities (i.e. privileged identities) are more aware of the identities which are oppressed by the situational environment. Relevant to this study, students may not have been aware of their privileged status in accelerated courses until they no longer have access to this advanced program (i.e. the honors program).

These multiple identities do not each exist separate from all others; rather, certain identities intersect into a distinct, additional identity status. For example, Jones and McEwen (2000) explained that gender was an identity dimension for all participants, yet "the description of what being female meant to them was quickly connected with other dimensions (e.g. Jewish woman, Black woman, lesbian, Indian woman)" (p. 410). Additionally, saliency of a particular identity fluctuates depending on the context; people may choose to downplay certain aspects of themselves in some situations, while still working to protect their own authenticity.

The model of multiple dimensions of identity was revised in Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) to reflect the importance of meaning-making capacity in the person's saliency of identities. This meaning-making capacity is integral to this study as the participants are asked to self-report the salience of single identities (e.g. being smart) among the complex web of what constitutes who they are. At play in this study is the transitional period from high school to college which occurred one year before this study. Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) stated that transition is a time "dominated by tensions

and unresolved conflicts between their developing internal voices and external influences" during which "students gradually question formulas increasingly incongruent with developing internal values" (p. 5). By incorporating this filter of perception and self-reflection, the MMDI describes "not only *what* relationships students perceive among their personal and social identities, but also *how* they come to perceive them as they do" (Abes et al., 2007, p. 13, emphasis in original). This focus on how allows the educator to empower the student to voice who they are instead of placement of stereotypical or experiential assumptions on what identities they are. This current study focused on the question of "who are you and why?" in order to better understand the students beyond sampling criteria of holding the identity of membership in 2012-2013 Jumpstart Business Community.

Jones, Kim, and Cilente Skendall (2012) urged further research on the dimensions of multiple identities as "developmental interventions based upon singular dimensions of identity may in fact perpetuate conforming to identity norms that do not reflect the richness of lived experience" (p. 719). With greater attention on how students and peer-colleagues navigate their multiplicities, educators may be able to better understand the areas in need of support to better recruit and retain high-quality individuals through an increase in sense of mattering.

Conclusion

Research on K-12 giftedness suggests these students have unique characteristics and needs which are supported through university honors programs. Students may be motivated by the challenges to achieve higher, yet perfectionism may create self-impediments for success. This current study explored important elements in the

renegotiation of identity as the smart one in the transition from high school to college. By seeking understanding of how this change in an external label affected the student, educators may help the student transition into college more successfully. Next, Chapter 3 explains the methods employed in this current study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Purpose Statement

The focus of this study is to explore the important elements in the identity renegotiation of being the smart one. There is an unexplored area of research in the factors important in identity development during the transition from secondary to higher education. The participants of this study were labeled as accelerated learners in high school and participated in the JBC learning community which was a second tier accelerated program in the business college instead of the top tier university honors program. These five individuals were questioned for understanding how the change in external label of accelerated learner impacted their internal label of being the smart one.

Research Questions

1. What are the important elements reported by second-year undergraduates formerly labeled as the smart one in high school in managing their multiple identities once transitioned into higher education at a research intensive institution's business college?
    a. How do participants report the salience of their intelligence level within their self-image in higher education versus earlier in their lives?
    b. What roles do participants report their social partners (i.e., family, friends, and classmates) play in their self-perception of high intelligence?
    c. What roles do participants report their groups of affiliation (e.g., academically related activities, non-academic activities, learning communities, etc.) play in the saliency of the label of intelligence?

d. How does the process of talking about the self-label of high intelligence affect participants' identity?

Questions 1b and 1c differ slightly in language in order to emphasize the importance of social comparison among family, friends, and classmates and importance our institutional authorities place on high intelligence.

Research Setting

To support the possibility of transferability of this study, I provide a detailed description of the research setting. This study was at a large, Midwestern institution, here referred to as Midwestern University (MU). More specifically, all participants are current or former students of the College of Business, and they are alumni of the 2012-2013 JBC. According to the MU statistics published publicly on the institution's web site, at the start of Fall 2012, the number of undergraduates enrolled at Midwestern University was 19,103 and the number of undergraduates within the College of Business was 3,172 including 567 first-time, full-time freshmen. According to the Director of Freshmen Programs for the College of Business, there were 488 students enrolled in BSAD 101 in Fall 2012. Per their inclusion in JBC, these students were in a smaller, more in-depth recitation section of BSAD 101 of only twenty individuals with two instructors.

The following information is included in order to provide context for the criteria which these students may have failed to meet as students who were not invited to the university honors program. The admissions web page of the MU honors program listed its eligibility requirements for Fall 2014 as the following: Earn a "composite ACT score of at least 30, or a combined SAT score of at least 1340 (Mathematics and Critical

Reading Total);" graduate at "top 10% high school class ranking;" and show a "demonstrated desire for academic rigor". The admissions web page lists the requirements of the program include the following: remaining a full-time student every semester; maintaining a cumulative GPA of 3.5/4.0; completing a minimum of 24 hours of Honors credit, including 12 credits of specific Honors courses; and the completion of a research or creative project. I was unable to gather the eligibility requirements for fall 2012, the semester these students would have been entering college, because it was not publicly available and my requests for the information were unfulfilled. The honors program did clarify that these criteria are used as objective measures, but meeting these criteria does not guarantee admission. In the context of this study, some participants may have met these objective measures for entry to the honors program, yet not gained admission due to other factors.

Jumpstart Business Community Experience

Next, information is provided on the Jumpstart Business Community (JBC) experience in order to give context for the academic achievement level which earned admission as well as experiences in the learning community which may have impacted the participants' identity as the smart one. Twenty students participated in the Jumpstart Business Community for their first year at Midwestern University. This learning community experience included residential, academic, and professional elements. The BSAD 101 course curriculum was supplemented by additional personal and professional developmental opportunities for the fall 2012 experience. The spring 2013 experience included two courses as a learning community and twice-monthly opportunities to network with faculty and employers.

BSAD 101 was a ten-week course in fall 2012 of one, 50-minute, approximately 200-person lecture and one, 50-minute discussion section of 25-30 students each week. JBC had a discussion section of only 20 individuals plus a two-hour studio section in addition to the lecture and recitation. This studio section met eight times in the semester for various learning activities beyond the course curriculum, described in the next paragraph. In addition, the students traveled with students in other College of Business learning communities to several corporations for site visits.

BSAD 101 focused on learning the ten College of Business majors, introducing Gallup StrengthsFinder as a tool for self-knowledge, learning about business and personal ethics, and identifying personal leadership philosophy. The JBC section added guest speaker panels on the following subjects: civic engagement with leaders from on-campus and local businesses; leadership with an administrator from MU, a faculty member from the College of Business, and two additional leaders from on-campus organizations; and academic success with eight juniors and seniors with high grade point averages and high involvement.

Prior to attending the required career fair and a lecture by a motivational speaker, JBC students attended a mock career fair the week before the event. Students also attended a private meeting with the speaker after his whole-course lecture. Both of these experiences focused on the importance of networking and making connections throughout their academic and professional career. These are examples of how these students were treated as deserving these special opportunities due to their identification as high-achieving. All supplemental speakers/guests were given a description of JBC which identified students as high achieving. Most speakers reinforced this message.

To supplement the course focus on Gallup Strengths, students underwent additional training in their first studio. Based on the research of Donald Clifton and others, the Gallup organization administers a personality assessment measuring individual talents such as Communication, Competition, and Woo (Clifton, Anderson, & Schreiner, 2006). The basic assessment provides the user their top five strength themes as well as an insight report describing how these may be expressed in the individual's work and school life. The composite results for these twenty individuals impacted the execution of the curriculum as, together, they posed personality combinations that could be conflicting.

Of the twenty students, six had both Competition and Achiever as a top-five theme as well as four additional with Competition and three additional with Achiever. Gallup described people with Competition as those who "measure their progress against the performance of others. They strive to win first place and revel in contests" (Asplund, Lopez, Hodges, & Harter, 2009, p. 25). Similarly, people with Achiever "have a great deal of stamina and work hard. They take great satisfaction from being busy and productive" (p. 25). The combination of strengths created a dynamic in the classroom in which students wanted every activity to have an achievable goal as the objective became winning, regardless of the actual learning objective. As the instructor, this meant restructuring teaching style in order to counteract or harness this dynamic, as needed. Not enough research has been done on high-intelligence students and their likelihood of certain strength themes; yet, their Gallup Strengths results for Competition (10 incidences in JBC), Achiever (9), and Responsibility (8) may be an important characteristic for understanding the context of this study.

One of the inspirations for this research study occurred in the JBC section of BSAD 101 when the students' written assignments made clear most defined themselves as better than others. One of the assignments for BSAD 101 asked students to define leadership. Many students self-identified as leaders with the rationale that they were often the best in classes or athletics and called upon to teach those with lower achievements. To address this assumption of superiority within the class discussion, the instructors assigned an additional reflection, centered on followership and the importance of supporting the ideas of others. This informed this study in the in-class discussion which followed this assignment. Students talked about their assumptions of leadership and the dissonance which the discussion of followership caused in their self-identity.

For the spring semester, most students took two introductory business courses together, but no official academic programming existed for the learning community. Since participation was not as mandatory, the number of students who attended events dropped dramatically to an average of six of the twenty at each session.

Research Site

Once the student expressed interest in participation in this study (see Appendix A-D for recruitment email), the interviewer sent the person a message stating that they had the choice of where to meet as long as it was quiet and semi-private. This allowed for the student to hold some agency over aspects of the interviewing process.

Qualitative Research Design

This exploration of the important elements around the identity of intelligence in this population could have been accomplished through a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods design. A qualitative design was used in order to provide an in-depth,

rich account of these students' experiences beyond which could have been achieved through quantitative methods.

This researcher operated from a constructivist view of the world in which the participants defined their own reality which is socially constructed and time and context dependent (Mertens, 2010). The aim of this study was to understand how students whose external labeling around intelligence has changed navigate their internal labeling of being the smart one. Toward this end, the constructivist worldview allowed participants to define their own reality of what it means to be the smart one in both high school and college.

Along with this researcher's constructivist worldview, phenomenological research aims to explore the participant's subjective experience and allow her/him to define the experience in her/his own terms (Mertens, 2010). In this way, each participant defined what it meant to be smart in high school, the experience of being in JBC and/or the university honors program, as well as the saliency of her/his intelligence identity.

When conducting these qualitative interviews, this researcher became her own instrument of analysis. In this way, the interview protocols were created specifically for this study and were not based on any previous study. Creswell (2014) emphasized this basic characteristic of qualitative research as key to gathering data which are meaningful to the study. Part of this process included reflexivity, creating memos and brackets of personal reactions to the data in order to pay attention to potential biases from the researcher's personal experiences and assumptions (Creswell, 2014).

Participant Selection

Purposeful, criterion-based sampling (Maxwell, 2013) was used to find students who were likely to have some salience of an identity related to being the smart one. Two cohorts of the JBC, which the primary investigator taught, were chosen as a target for recruitment because of my access to and relationships with the students. The 2012-2013 cohort was the target for recruitment since they had experienced three semesters of higher education, thus I anticipated they may be further along in their identity development and more capable of sharing rich data. Maxwell (2013) emphasized the importance of sampling which represents the full population, thus care was taken to include at least one female and no more than three individuals who were also members of the honors program.

I contacted students in the JBC cohort to explain the purpose and requirements of this study. I received a total of eight positive responses, five of which persisted to the interview stage. Positive respondents were asked to choose a location and time from the suggestions provided. The first four interested students did not meet the initial sampling criteria because it was discovered they had been admitted to the honors program. This discovery led me to further explore the twenty students in the JBC 2012-2013 cohort. I discovered that six were registered as part of the honors program. I was unaware at the time of my initial recruitment that any of the students had been admitted to the honors program because the target population for JBC was students who were high achieving but not admitted to honors. With this information, I decided to expand the original focus of the study to include students in JBC who had been accepted to honors. The focus of the study at this point changed from being necessarily about students who had not been

accepted to an honors program, to more generally about the development of intelligence identity with the transition from high school high achievement programs to college.

Ultimately, all five participants in this study were members of the same cohort of JBC. Three participants had been accepted to the honors program and two had not been. Of those who replied to the recruitment email but did not complete the interviews, one person expressed interest several times, and then did not follow through with scheduling an interview. A different person expressed interest twice, but subsequently failed to reply to further communication. The researcher had to make the decision to stop pursuing these two individuals in order to meet the time constraints of this study. The participants in this study provided a rich data set of experiences because of the possible identity renegotiation that occurred during the transition from accelerated learning programs in secondary education to the second tier academic program of JBC. For three individuals, the transition into the university honors program also shaped their identity negotiation process.

Participants

The five participants included four men and one woman. The 2012-2013 cohort of JBC consisted of twelve men and eight women so the participants do not reflect the gender composition of JBC.

One of the original intentions of this study was to focus on experiences of students not accepted into the honors program, because it was assumed based on JBC's recruiting strategy they would not have students in the honors program. However, I discovered several students in JBC had subsequently been invited to the honors program. Three of the male participants (Henry, Patrick, and Stephen) were honors students and

the other man and the woman (Jeremy and Rachel) were not in honors. All three honors students included in this study shared that they lived in the honors residence hall and took a required honors first-year seminar course, but were not otherwise involved in honors programs activities.

Four of the five participants identified as White and did not discuss their ethnic heritage. The fifth emigrated from China as a child and identified as Asian American. Only one of the participants mentioned socioeconomic status. All but one mentioned that at least one parent has at least a baccalaureate degree. All five stated that they identify as "straight," but did not expand on what this means to them.

Interview Protocol

Two interview protocols were used in this study: one focused on the reflection of experiences as an accelerated learner and the other reflected on the process of talking about one's identity around intelligence through the study. See Appendix for the interview protocol.

The first interview protocol examined the participants' multiple dimensions of identity. The model of multiple dimensions of identity asserts that the salience of each identity dimension to the core sense of self is shaped by contextual influences (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). For high-achieving students, the context of their identity of being smart used to occur in an environment which supported and validated that identity through membership in an accelerated learning curriculum. Now, the saliency level of their smart identity may have changed as part of the transition to higher education and/or external validation provided through acceptance to JBC and/or the university honors program.

Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) described the pathway toward self-authorship as a "transitional period dominated by tensions and unresolved conflicts between their developing internal voices and external influences, students gradually question formulas increasingly incongruent with developing internal values" (p. 5). To begin the process of discussing the identity around intelligence, the first question of my protocol asks simply, "Who are you?" When prompted for more information, "Tell me about your background and your involvement in high school and at the University." The purpose of this question was to gather open-ended information on how the participant defines her/himself. The next three questions examined the personal definition of being smart and execution of acting smart, followed by a reflection on experiences in JBC.

The second half of the first interview (see Appendix E) moves from a reflection of the past to present experiences. The first question of this section asks, "What are your social identities?" By framing the conversation around social identities, this creates a context by which to define one's intelligence in college. As second-year students, each participant has experienced three semesters of college experiences and contextual influences. Another item asked, "Please provide a situation where you felt your perceived intelligence was particularly important." Additional guidelines were provided that the situation may have occurred "in a classroom, in a friend group or with family, in an extracurricular activity, or in a job" as the saliency of a label is affected by a full range of contextual influences.

The last three questions examined the abstract, personal, and societal implications of being smart. Heuristic phenomenological research aims to make meaning from the experiences of the participants; truth is created through our social interactions (Mertens,

2010). By discussing personal viewpoints and experiences about being smart as told by the participant, researchers can better understand their truths. Ultimately, the purpose of the first interview was to create reflective questions for the participants to respond to in the moment while also creating opportunities for targeted reflection. The intent was to prime the participants with questions for them to consciously or unconsciously ponder in the weeks between interviews. Although all participants were asked to think about the material, only one brought written notes of his reflection to the second interview.

The second interview protocol (see Appendix F) was designed to build upon the targeted questions from the first interview and ask for additional, deeper information on certain topics. The emphasis of the second interview was to explore the pathway toward self-authorship. In what ways do these students define themselves and based on what contextual influences? To this end, the first two questions inquired about further information the participant wished to share after the first interview and the second question provided the interviewer an opportunity to clarify topics from the first interview.

The third question in the second interview protocol explored, "How was the experience of being interviewed on the topic of being smart?" in order to learn more about the process of talking about an identity which may have lost validation. This question specifically addressed the process of talking about their identities in order to discuss why they defined themselves as they had in the first interview.

Researcher Role-Reflexivity

I was in accelerated learning programs in elementary and secondary education, as well as in a university-level honors program for completion of my baccalaureate degree. As one of the instructors for the JBC section of a first-year experience course, I shared

this similarity of experiences with these students in order to build an open, mentoring relationship. Although I shared the status of accelerated learner in secondary education with the students, the fact that I continued into an honors program and several of the participants did not continue to an honors program may have impacted the expectations of and relationships with the students when participating in this study.

Additionally, I completed an undergraduate thesis toward my honors scholar designation which explored the experiences of honors students within one year of graduation. The previous study differs from this study which occurs two or three years earlier in the students' undergraduate career. Those students in my previous study talked reflectively of the importance of being seen as an honors student. They also discussed whether their identity status was salient in how they see themselves. Approaching the current study, I assumed that the participants would still be undergoing the transition in their intelligence identity, based on my experiences/findings of the prior study.

The JBC section of BSAD 101 was taught by the Assistant Dean of the College of Business and me, one of two graduate assistants for the Assistant Dean's office. Although curriculum development and teaching was a collaborative effort, I performed all of the grading and most program coordination.

Storing and Managing Data

Audio recordings were conducted on a smartphone and emailed to the principal investigator. Once the recording was transcribed, the recording was deleted from the smartphone. The audio recording was saved on a password-protected flash drive for use in transcription. Once all transcriptions were complete, the audio recordings were deleted in May 2014 to protect participant confidentiality. During transcription, identifying

information was removed and replaced with pseudonyms where possible. Transcripts were stored on the same password-protected flash drive as the audio recordings.

Data Analysis

I completed the transcription myself in order to be immersed in the data directly. During the transcription process, I made comments on the side when a passage seemed particularly meaningful. These comments did not occur often, but usually noted a passage which seemed to be particularly reflective of the research questions. Later, these comments were used as starting points for identifying salient points across participant interviews.

I listened to each interview audio twice to decrease transcript errors. In addition, I affirmed that each omission from transcription was truly for tangential information and not reflective of the students' experiences within the parameters of the research questions. One representative example of omitted information is the several-minute passage where someone stopped to talk to this researcher during her second interview with Stephen. Due to time restraints, only the first round interviews were given this second read-through and this step was skipped for the second round interviews.

Each of the ten transcripts underwent two close readings. The first consisted of reading each of the five, first round interviews for salient points. As previously noted, the comments made during transcription were used as starting points, but this researcher highlighted all information which seemed interesting. The five, second-round interviews were highlighted for saliency to themes across participants and concepts from the theoretical framework. Microsoft Word creates a reading panel of all highlighted

portions. This summary of points from each of the ten interviews was transferred to one document to collect all relevant points in one place.

In order to understand the experiences of each of the five participants as individuals, the ten interviews were summarized, and I created participant profiles. These profiles also served to clarify the findings across participants. The intent of qualitative research is not to generalize across the entire population; instead, these profiles helped to place the unique experiences of these individuals into their particular contexts. These participant profiles are included later in this chapter.

After the close reading of each transcript and creation of member profiles, I created codes which reflected the categorical findings. An additional reading of the transcripts followed in order to check that these findings were reflected in the full body of data.

Data Validation

During the revision process of this thesis, two first-year master's students studying higher education completed a peer debrief of the analysis processes. The purpose of the peer debrief was to assure that the findings were representative of the data. They confirmed the plausibility of the findings based on the data. One peer debriefer also recommended clarification of one of the themes, and I have changed the wording to reflect this.

Additionally, the five participants were sent the findings chapter in order to seek member checks of their participant profile and the ways their experiences were represented in the findings. This resulted in a follow-up interview with Patrick and a detailed report from Henry of suggested alterations. Both agreed that the findings were

congruent with their experiences, yet resulted in minor clarifications to themes two and seven.

In order to monitor my progressive subjectivity, I journaled my assumptions from each of the first interviews and shared them with the participant at the beginning of her/his second interview. According to Mertens (2010), this process allows the participant to challenge the researcher-as-instrument and lessen the impact of the researcher's biases. Anecdotally, this process allowed me to keep an open mind to participants' construction of reality.

Ethical Considerations

In order to earn research approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Midwestern University, I completed the Consortium for IRB Training Initiative in Human Subjects Protection (CITI). I submitted the initial proposal to the IRB on October 19, 2013 and the project was certified as exempt, category 2 status on November 8, allowing participant recruitment to begin (see Appendix F). Per IRB protocol, permission was granted from the Director of Freshmen Program for the College of Business to recruit from the JBC section of BSAD 101.

The participants signed consent forms, which explained the rationale of the study, before the researcher began the interview. I also reminded them that they were not required to participate, and noted that their real names and other identifying information would be protected. The second interview began with granting of continued consent and space for any questions about their role in the research process.

To protect confidentiality, the researcher assigned pseudonyms to each participant as well as to the learning community. The researcher used generalized terms for the

institution, college, and on-campus leaders who impacted the students. Any real names mentioned by the participants during the study were omitted in the transcript and replaced with generalized terms or pseudonyms when needed.

As a graduate assistant in the College of Business who performed academic advising for undergraduates including the participants, I took additional steps to protect their confidentiality. To remove the possibility for colleagues or other students to see emails with research participants, I communicated through my personal email address which is not open at work.

As these students' former instructor, I paid attention to creation of an informal setting. Several times, we met over lunch or spent several minutes before the interview talking about the winter vacation (in future or past tense, depending on whether first or second interview). During the question about whether JBC had an effect on their identity or experience, the researcher took care to state that they can feel comfortable saying no as she would not be insulted. None of the five communicated verbally or nonverbally any discomfort with the researcher's role as their former instructor. Two stated that this actually made the conversation easier because they had trust in the relationship.

The potential participants were informed that they retained the option of choosing any of the ten advisers in the College of Business advising office in case they wanted an adviser independent of me. The participants were reminded their role in this research would not be shared within the College. If the individual sought academic advising through the office and this researcher was the next available adviser, the individual was given the option of waiting for the next person, at her/his discretion as was common with all students.

Participant Profiles

The following are descriptions of the five participants focused around these three pieces of information: (a) what I understand to make the participant unique based on my relationship with the participant; (b) their interpretation of their smartness; and (c) their social identities.

Patrick. Patrick was an MU honors student who was in the process of transferring to a Christian college in the area when he participated in this study. During both interviews, Patrick referred to his excitement to start over somewhere new that tied into his newly-core faith identity. Of the five students, Patrick is the person with whom I had met most often and most recently before the initiation of this study.

Patrick regarded himself as one of the smart ones in high school and is now reexamining how he compares to the others in college. In high school, Patrick described himself in comparison to his peers as doing well without trying that hard. That being said, he explained that he was always seen as "the super smart math guy" and this respect provided him much self-worth. Now in college, Patrick reported this superiority evaporated living in the honors residence hall. He used to be one of few smart people and now he lives among 400 of those same-level students in one building. Patrick admitted that he compares himself to peers though he should not; this new comparison group made him realize "my place in life is not to be on top. I am a middle of the pack person when it comes to intelligence, ambition, functionality in society. I'm just another cog in the big machine without any major importance in the big picture of things." This spirit of being not as smart as he thought he was pervaded both interviews.

When asked for his social identities, Patrick stated that he is a White male as those "are the two easy ones." Additionally, he listed off that he is heterosexual, of Eastern European descent, and 20 years old. As personality characteristics, Patrick disclosed "socially awkward White male who's a Christian, who's a nerd." When asked in the second interview to discuss identities are most central to him, Patrick struggled to pinpoint any of the above, instead reiterating and emphasizing a different one: living with Asperger's. Patrick shared that his comfort divulging this part of his identity has increased since his diagnosis four years ago because it has helped him navigate social situations better than just being the awkward, antisocial one. At the conclusion of the second interview, Patrick summarized that faith had replaced smartness as his primary identity with third place to Asperger's.

Henry. Henry is an honors student who changed his major in his second semester from the College of Business to a different college at MU. He lived with his grandparents in China while his parents completed graduate school in the United States and joined them in the U.S. when he was five or six years old. The importance of education and achieving good marks were woven into his entire childhood as his family impressed upon him that reading and watching Nova, an educational television channel, were the only appropriate breaks from school. This emphasis on education led him to take as many Advanced Placement courses as he could in the last three years of high school and placed him a year or more ahead in mathematics. I had met with Henry several times as an advisor in his first semester of college and was not surprised when he volunteered for this study as the conversations during those meetings helped spur my interest in the topic of identity renegotiation around being the smart one.

Henry shared that he thinks he was smart in high school because he got good grades and other people saw him as smart for his achievement level in math and other courses. In college, he thinks but is not sure if he is still smart as he has only taken the lower-level courses so far. Henry says that smartness in college is putting knowledge and skills into action, or as he described, "how useful you will be to the world." He believes that the effort level of inside and outside the honors program is the same, "I don't actually feel like the people in the honors program have a huge difference in how studious they are or how much they study than people not in the honors program. It's not as big as people would expect, the gap." When asked if he thought there was a difference between himself and those not in the program, Henry said yes, but rationalized himself to no, "I guess I'd say I deserved it because I was really motivated, but then saying that, on that point, I'd say a lot of people if given the chance would do well in the honors program." Henry is happy to be in the program because of the opportunities he gets to live with people similar to him and to take small-group seminars, yet he felt the criteria used for entry was unfair because he is no smarter than his friends who are not in honors.

On the topic of social identities during the first interview, Henry shared that he was "probably the average college student" who is male. On the topic of gender, he defined himself as "I guess I do fit into some stereotypical traits of masculinity or at least, I wish to portray that." He also explained his current struggle between ethnic origin of Chinese and his nationality as an American. In his words,

> I know back in the day, I was always very adamant that 'I'm an American.' As I grow older, I know America is a very accepting place, definitely, but it is still hard being a different ethnicity where everyone is something else so I'm starting to wonder, 'will I fit back into my natural, Chinese origin, or Chinese culture?'

Henry expounded on these identities by talking about how his intelligence identity intersects with his ethnic origin and nationality. He experienced that "in high school it'd be like 'oh, you're Asian, you're good at math.'" He did not feel this was a negative, but he felt it made him less motivated to put the effort in to improve since he was already treated as superior in the subject.

Jeremy. Jeremy is a non-honors student double-majoring in the College of Business at MU. I did not have much of a relationship with him outside of the class in his first semester of college and was pleasantly surprised when he volunteered for this study. Jeremy is not a talkative or emotive person and this led to shorter interviews. That being said, the information provided, especially in his second interview, was sufficiently rich.

Jeremy regarded himself as smart in high school and as equally smart as students in the MU honors program, though he does harbor some bitterness that he was not admitted based on what he feels was only one point too low on his composite ACT score. Jeremy's childhood included much moving as his dad was in the Army. His interpretation of the effect of this is that it hindered him from making close friends, yet it led him to focus on studying more to keep up with changing curricula.

When first asked for his social identities, Jeremy was the only one of five participants to recite off the full list provided, "I'm 19 almost 20, I'm a male, I'm, depending on how broadly you get in ethnic origin, I'm White and I'm European – Eastern-European. Straight and I'm – I've got severely poor vision, I guess you could call that disability." Jeremy challenged my questioning of how important being smart is to his identity because he felt "as you live your life you should probably be more happy

[sic] with how you live your life than how intelligent you are because you should probably just live life rather than worrying about it." Later, Jeremy expanded on this to say that thinking about his own smartness compared to others would get in the way of achieving his personal goals. Although this solo spirit exists in his academic world (i.e., studying on his own, not interacting with his classmates beyond necessary), Jeremy is highly involved in two social activities: member of an investments club and newly-elected president of an academic fraternity.

Stephen. Stephen is an Honors student in the College of Business who took advantage of JBC opportunities when asked. Although my relationship with him did not extend beyond the learning community, I was not surprised when he volunteered of his high level of involvement. Stephen is from a city environment in a different Midwest state several hours away. With the exception of Jeremy (whose family moves often), Stephen is the only participant not from the surrounding area of MU.

Stephen's perspective differs from the others in his attention to "Home Stephen" versus "School Stephen" and the differing saliencies of his identities. Growing up, Stephen's parents created an expectation that education comes first by having him focus on mastering material to never be in remedial courses. Stephen knew that he was smart in high school because all of his friends were, too. He came to MU as a result of his invitation to the honors program. He felt that this program would "shrink campus for me because I'd be more with higher, more educated people who care about their schooling" compared to the small, liberal arts college he was considering. Although he likes being in honors, he credits JBC for widening his definition of intelligence because the networking components taught him that intelligence was more than just book-smarts.

Toward this end, Stephen was very involved in high school and his first year of college. During the first interview, Stephen mentioned exiting extracurricular activities to focus on his more intensive courses that semester. His course load shifted from 100/200-level courses to 300/400-level ones and he felt he was not "grown enough and [doesn't] intellectually meet those standards yet." It is important to him that he immerses himself back into activities, though, because he defined a smart person in college as one who maintains a GPA above 3.0 while also involved in several other activities. During the second interview, Stephen expressed concern that he felt little motivation to improve himself, calling himself lazier than he thought he was.

In discussing his social identities, Stephen associated his age with his high dependence on technology, both using his smartphone for the internet and watching Japanese anime. Also, he placed his socioeconomic class as middle class, though he gets frustrated when others think his family is upper-middle class. In addition, he refers to himself as White, but says that racial identity does not come into play much because his friend group is so diverse with best friends that are Mexican, Asian, and African American. Stephen stated that spirituality and sexual orientation do not factor into his identities. He appreciated talking about the social identities because he believed it will help him extend his comfort zone and make it easier to handle future tasks and situations.

Rachel. Rachel is the only female in this study and represents one of only eight women in the twenty-person cohort of JBC. She is not in honors and is very highly involved in the college and sorority. Rachel attended most of the mandatory and optional events during her year in JBC, thus I thought I had gotten to know her through these interactions, yet was still surprised when she volunteered for this study. Earlier, informal

attempts to ask how school was going were answered curtly so I assumed she would not be open to talking in detail about her intelligence identity. Although many of my presumptions were validated by what she shared in these interviews, I was able to gain a wider view of her experience around smartness and feel that this added richness of experience to the data.

Rachel identified as talkative and social. She divulged many details about her home life; for the purpose of clarification, all quotes which refer to "stepdad" and "dad" are the same person as her parents married when she was a teenager and there are no references to her biological father in the data.

Rachel was highly involved in high school. She described her activities as "band, concert band, show choir … I was in softball all four years, I was in basketball for one year. I was a dancer for three years. I did track all four years." Her time management strategy to achieve good grades was to do homework during school and on down time before her activities. It was not often that Rachel needed to spend much time at home doing schoolwork. These strategies did not work when she came to college and did not have so much structure, resulting in lower grades and higher anxiety. Rachel's identity around smartness was in active flux during the interview period as she tried to reestablish her academic reputation and develop positive coping skills for her testing anxiety. The social comparison to her peers in JBC validated her smartness while also creating anxiety that everyone was taking some courses together yet she was not doing as well as others. Many of Rachel's identities center back on her perspective of herself as a good person.

Rachel reported her social identities as a college student who is outgoing, social opinionated, and brutally honest, while also self-conscious and independent. When

pressed in the second interview to talk about her age, gender, sex, ethnic origin, race, sexual orientation, and ability status, she continued to struggle to put words to her perceptions. We discussed each category one-by-one and she was able to articulate that her gender/sex (for her, the same term) is "girl"; her nationality is "American"; and her faith is "believer." These identities are central to her; yet, she reported that the most important pieces of who she is are her characteristics as an honest, outgoing, good person, especially in the context of being a good, faithful daughter. When asked directly, her intelligence identity places high, but she did not otherwise bring it up when asked about how she defines herself.

Conclusion

Since this study had a phenomenological design, the focus was to understand the meanings my participants gave to their intelligence identity. Five participants from the twenty person 2012-2013 cohort of JBC participated in a two-round interview process around their multiple dimensions of identity. The analysis process had five steps in order to create holistic, valid findings, including data validation from two outside readers and by the participants. In the next section, I will discuss the meanings the participants made of the important elements of managing their identities.

Chapter 4

Findings

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to explore the group of students who were externally labeled accelerated learners in high school and how they make meaning of their intelligence identity now in their second undergraduate year. The participants were recruited from the 2012-2013 cohort of Jumpstart Business Community (JBC), of which five of the twenty students volunteered to participate. Each of these students participated in two semi-structured interviews two to four weeks apart.

Overview of Themes and Subthemes

After conducting the first-round interviews, seven themes emerged from the data. These are displayed below with the accompanying portion of the research questions. The first sub-question referred to how the students described their intelligence level within their self-image in higher education and earlier in their lives. The two themes that emerge to this end are that (1) high school intelligence and college intelligence are different and that (2) challenges to intelligence bring salience to identity and potential renegotiation. The theme around the second sub-question, students' report of their social partners' role in their self-perception of intelligence, was that (3) family determined and motivated intelligence and now friends reflect intelligence.

The third sub-question sought to define the role of groups of affiliation in saliency of intelligence label and the themes emerged that (4) connections with JBC professors and similarly driven peers reinforced intelligence identity and (5) co-curricular involvement and peers played a significant role in identity negotiation. Finally, the

fourth sub-question explored the process of talking about self-label of high intelligence and the two themes were that (6) saliency of identities fluctuates and that (7) answering questions about identity is difficult, but helpful in renegotiating identity. What follows is an exposition on each of these seven findings.

Summary of Findings

Sub-question 1A. How do participants report the salience of their intelligence level within their self-image in higher education versus earlier in their lives?

Theme 1: High school intelligence versus college intelligence is different. According to the five participants, high school is about potential and raw skill whereas college is about performance and applying knowledge and skill. In other words, college is about putting potential into action and getting results by putting in the effort. Patrick said that college taught him that he has the bad kind of intelligence in that he has the raw ability to pick up on things easily, but does not have the skill of how to learn.

> I care about school, I want to be in school, I know, I understand the importance of education. But, because it was always easy for me up until college, I didn't put in a lot of effort. Other people would have to put in hours and hours to write their three-page report, I would type it up the morning of, turn it in and get an A on it, that kind of thing. Calc exams I never studied and aced – well, I got As on all of them. And um, so I developed this general attitude of [pause] laziness, I guess, because it was easy for me and there was no point in trying really, really hard because I got the same grade and it didn't matter because in high school, grade is all that matters.

This means that when academic tasks became difficult, he could not apply prior learning skills to gain knowledge. When he got into his second semester of college, he realized, in his own words, "wow, it's actually work so I started working and then I stopped because I'm lazy. I'm not lazy because I don't care, I'm lazy because it used to be easy and… I

don't want to change." During the member check process, Patrick clarified that it was more than just laziness, but fear that he did not know how to learn that motivated his apprehension to put in the effort to succeed.

Rachel described smartness as an aspect of time management – being able to have fun and do things because you do not have to study all the time. Also, motivation – making yourself focus on getting better when topics do not come easily. She defined smartness in high school in the following way:

> Defining smart would be academically book-smart, knowing your stuff... As well as you have to be well-rounded, you have to be involved. Being smart doesn't always mean you're doing homework all the time, you're studying all the time. To be honest, I didn't study that much in high school and I still got good grades. I was considered a smart person… this is kind of a hard one. Knowing how to manage things, knowing your academic levels is the biggest thing.

Her definition of smartness changed for college:

> academics are way more important than in high school. While high school gets you to college, college gets you to your career so I think it's way more important. People come from different backgrounds, people come from different disciplines and I feel like, different motivations, different methods of studying, whatever they're used to in high school, whether they took [Advanced Placement courses].

Rachel defined smartness in college as dependent on your preparation level, while also impacted by your motivation level. Her perception of her own smartness was threatened in college until she realized that time-management was her issue; now that she has started to develop this skill, her confidence is improving.

Jeremy defined smartness in high school as not having to work as hard as others and still achieving high success. In college, he said you need to put the work into your studies or else you cannot achieve. He stated, "I think regular intelligence plays a part, but time management's really big." He defined himself as smart because "most of the

time I excel at things that are academic." According to Jeremy, smartness in college is also reflected by the fact that you got into that school. He makes the assertion that by the fact that you got in, it means you can apply what you know better than someone at a lesser-ranked school. Also, smartness is common sense in combination with intelligence. In summation, smartness in college is what you're born with, what you develop, and what you can do.

Henry summed up the difference between high school smart and college smart similarly to the other four participants, but more succinctly:

> I realized that in college it takes maybe two types of smarts to succeed. You have the people who are bookish and who got good grades, but maybe I personally wouldn't consider them to be the smartest of all – they were smart, of course, you had to be smart to succeed in school. And then there were people who didn't get good grades, but I could tell they could've if they put forth the effort to succeed. You've gotta have both in college to succeed.

Henry reported feeling others' perceptions of his smartness changed from high school to college. He described that his smart label was very surface-level and apparent in high school with common occurrences of people referring to him, saying "oh, he's in that class, he must be really smart" yet he did not feel discriminated against or called a nerd. Yet, when he came to college, he felt negative reactions to his smartness. He reported that others have negative perceptions of the people in the honors program and that living in the honors residence hall makes him a target.

Theme 2: Challenges to intelligence bring salience to identity and potential renegotiation. As people grow older, the experiences they have shape how they see themselves. College affected all five participants as their intelligence identity was tested by negative experiences. For Stephen and Rachel, peers distracted them, and they felt

challenge to maintaining their intelligence identity. Of the five, Henry expressed the least challenge to his identity. Patrick and Jeremy, however, shared that the saliency of their identity of intelligence surfaced when comparing themselves to peers.

Stephen did not answer the question whether he felt his identity of being the smart one has changed, only noting that the temptations of technology and procrastination caused him difficulty. His courses required more time and he was not managing his time well; when his intelligence was challenged, he surrounded himself with friends to avoid thinking about what was worrying him, even though he admitted this was not productive. This meant going home over the winter break and spending the full time with friends instead of studying for his major exam that month. In conversation of when he planned to retake the exam, he pointed out his conflicting priorities which complicate this plan. Unlike his father who wanted him to retake soon in order to move on to studying for the next exam in the series, Stephen stressed the importance of balancing other initiatives. The fact that he did not pass the exam the first time created apprehension to put off priorities again (e.g., social time with friends). His identity changed from unilaterally basing his success off of one priority (i.e., the exam) to satisfactorily accomplishing as many priorities as he could including hanging out with friends, studying abroad in the summer, and doing well in all of his courses.

Rachel's identity of being the smart one was challenged by friends and over-involvement. Rachel never had to do much homework beyond her school day so it was difficult to structure study time. As of the time of the interviews, Rachel developed productive friendships which created positive social pressure to study better and more often. The challenge to Rachel's identity as the smart one came in the form of tests

which seemed straightforward and for which she had studied but that resulted in grades which did not reflect her effort. This dropped her GPA below 3.0 on a 4.0 scale; fortunately, she is now using student services for aid and has hope for improvement.

Rachel reported that the challenge extended beyond just her own performance to the comparison to her peers. Rachel saw how she could be performing based on the performance of the peers she saw as her equals, yet she was not meeting those standards. Seeing her roommate succeed resulted in both pride and envy that material came more easily to the friend. This manifested in Rachel's second semester of her sophomore year as worry that if the friend struggled in a certain course, there is no chance but that she will certainly fail. Faced with influences that she may not be as smart as she thought, Rachel sought out other ways to regard herself positively.

Patrick's challenges consisted of perfectionism and procrastination. He identified himself as "lazy" because doing well was no longer easy. Living in the Honors hall shook his identity as smart because he was surrounded by people who seemed smarter than him.

> living in the honors dorm doesn't because I get there and everybody there is like me in that they're the smart group. But now instead of being there's a smart group of us of maybe 20 ish – maybe 30, but broken up into cliques and what not – 30 ish of us out of 1500, you've now got 400 some students in the same building. So it's like my graduating class, suddenly everybody is as smart as me or smarter and living in the same building as I am. And so, what was friendly competition with other people being smarter than me and me being wrong when they were right suddenly became so many people know so much more than I do that I started to believe, started to have those doubts about me being smart, but for the most part, I made myself believe that I was smarter than I was, am. So, that's why it's like, intended to be a continuation but it wasn't because reality decided to show up and knock on the front door.

Now, he sees himself as less smart than he thought he was; coming to college and being in the honors program among so many others who he regards as smart as or smarter than himself made him reconsider his intelligence identity.

On the opposite side of the confidence spectrum as Patrick, Jeremy has a strong fear of failing which is only counteracted by good grades. When he got 76 percent correct on an accounting test, he responded by studying more than thirty hours in just the few days before his next exam. He felt that this crunch method did work, but he suffered much stress. When Jeremy did not gain admittance to the honors program, he rationalized that he missed out by one point on his composite ACT score. He remembers being told that the ACT score needed was a 28 (he got a 27), but that he met all other requirements. To him, the fact that some people may be better at standardized tests does not mean those people are smarter than him. When he was not invited to the honors program, his intelligence identity became more salient; his subsequent experiences with peers are now framed by this experience of not being accepted as the smart one in college, in his view, as a result of faulty measures.

When Jeremy did not do as well as he hoped on his accounting exam, he got really scared and began to do long, intense study sessions by himself until he learned the material. I asked whether this response has occurred in any other courses and he shared that he is scared at the beginning of every course until they start to learn the material. If he can achieve good grades, the anxiety subsides, but if he struggles, the anxiety around that course will last until he gets the final course grade. Jeremy credited this anxiety at the beginning of the semester to the fact that he moved around as a child, always fearful

of the need for a new rhythm. Jeremy's intelligence identity is challenged consistently every semester until fading into a lower saliency after affirmation through good grades.

Sub-question 1B. What roles do participants report their social partners (i.e., family, friends, and classmates) play in their self-perception of high intelligence?

Theme 3: Family determined and motivated intelligence and now friends reflect intelligence. All five participants mentioned the important role their family members played in the creation of their smartness. Parents were the first to define intelligence and meeting this goal, even in changing their own definition, is still important. In school, peers become the natural opinion leaders who validate or call into question participants' self-view.

For the three honors students (Stephen, Patrick, and Henry), the environment growing up was one which emphasized high performance academically. For Stephen, this meant "my parents always strived to have me do the hardest material, to try to advance myself far enough that I didn't have to sit through remedial courses, I guess so they'd know I'd make it in the world someday." He watched little television and his parents emphasized mathematics such that he was able to skip several levels in middle and high school. Similarly, Patrick is the "son of a tech geek" so he felt pressure to live up to that expectation. This meant achieving the proficiency with computers to feign higher skills when he felt challenged to meet others' expectations. He shared that he was relieved not to be a computer science major in college and looked forward to the fact that this was not an option at his new institution.

When discussing the definition of smart and the stakeholders in his perception of smartness, Henry shared that intelligence held no social collateral with friends in high

school but that it was very important for his parents/family to see him as intelligent. His parents' interpretations of what it meant to be successful led him to try two different directions when he started college: computer science and biology. He took an introductory course in both of these areas and quickly discovered that biology was not his strength. He expanded on their influence on his major choice, "My parents were always like 'you can't be a geology major, even if it's your passion because you'll make no money' so that slightly influenced me. I don't completely agree." Although they never expressly defined intelligence, he knows that their view of success and intelligence means making money so he needed to find a lucrative career; yet, his view of intelligence is broader to include content knowledge and ability to put the knowledge into practice.

When pressed to explain how his parents' definition of smartness interacts with his own, he responded,

> I don't know if my parents ever really gave a definition of smart, they always pushed "do well in school and get good grades." Actually, never mind, I guess that was their definition of smart and that wasn't mine. I felt like there are things outside of what you do for the classroom that define how smart you are and I stood by that and success, my parents are pretty extreme in that they believe that success is just making money [laughs] and that's definitely not my definition. So, in a way I think I made my definitions of smart the opposite of what they say matters because I didn't really like their definition.

He clarified that his definition is not just the surface-level "list of As on your report card [or] how much money you make, there are other hidden things that define how smart you are." In the second interview, Henry read from notes he had written between the two interviews,

> There are a lot of different definitions [of being smart], each just as valid as the other. I guess there are some types of smart which I value more. For instance, in high school, people getting good grades is a type of smart, but

> for instance, for me, just how fast I pick up on things, how high their IQ is, I guess, is my measure of smart.

Henry credits his parents entirely for the fact that he is now smart. Growing up in China until age five or six, Henry says he was spoiled by his grandparents. Yet, he noted that his parents' strictness created a structure of limited socializing and advanced mathematics which helped him excel. Henry reported that this management of his time continued until he was in high school, at which time he started to motivate himself.

In high school, Henry reported that his peers reinforced that he was smart. When asked how smart he was in high school compared to his peers, Henry said he was in the upper echelon. He measured this based on the fact that others treated him as the smartest for the fact that he was a year ahead in math courses. He said, "I don't think that was a good indicator of how smart someone was, but I felt I was more aware, I guess, or less one-dimensional than some of the other people" may have inferred.

Contrary to Henry's experience with peer reinforcement, Rachel's college friends hindered the strategies that she had used and succeeded with in high school, negatively impacting her grades. Without the structure present in high school and among individuals who did not seem to need to study that much, she did not have anyone influencing her to put in the work to succeed. When she compared her outcomes to their outcomes, her peers challenged her intelligence identity. Now, she has surrounded herself with people who motivate her to do school work in the library together. The friends motivate her to put in the effort and time; yet, she added that seeing them achieve more/better increases her anxiety and decreases her self-worth.

Rachel and Stephen both shared that when they experienced a negative event, they both called their mothers. I asked Stephen how he dealt with getting grades that

counteracted his intelligence status. He responded immediately, "Well, I call my mother." I asked what she says and he replied,

> I pretty much tell her I got a bad grade and she tells me it's not the end of the world, it's just one bad test grade and as long as you learn from your mistakes, it really doesn't matter as much.… I've learned that if I ever do poorly, I go to her, she understands because she didn't get the best of grades throughout school so she knows bad things happen and it's more about learning from your mistakes.

He shared that this allows him to stay calm and move forward, visiting office hours to learn the material he did not understand for the test.

Rachel was inspired by the hard work of her mom and stepdad. Her mother earned her associate's degree before Rachel was born, but soon after getting divorced, Rachel's mother also lost her job so she decided to go back to school. Rachel spent much of her time after school in middle school with her to-be-stepdad and other family while her mother finished her bachelor's degree in 18 months. Similarly, Rachel is inspired by her dad and shares her frustration that he is only one course away from earning his degree. Her parents reinforce that she is smart and even when she struggles she continues to feel that they are on her side, rooting for her to get the help she needs to get better. When other influences challenge her self-efficacy, Rachel's parents validate and support her identities.

In the same way that Rachel's family provided the validation and support, she was challenged by the comparisons to her peers. She explained:

> But friends, the way they impact me is [pause] mixed because I surround myself with very smart people, very intellectual people. Deep down, I am that person, I'm very independent person, I'm very self-sufficient but then again I have those friends who aren't like me.

Rachel clarified later that she cares deeply what others think of her so much that when she is around people who do not know her that well she worries, "what do you know about me that I don't know that you know?" She admitted this causes much self-consciousness, yet she strives to be authentic and comfortable in her skin. She stated often in the second interview that caring less what others think of her is something that she is working on improving.

How Patrick's peers judged him was very important and something of which he was always conscious and usually perceived negatively. In a long soliloquy, Patrick told the story of his first impression of JBC:

> actually that first Sunday, JBC went out to the field trip, … at one point we were doing this balance beam type thing where there were multiple large pallets essentially above the ground and then there were 4x4s or 6x4s connecting them and then certain number of tennis balls and shoots and stuff and do something to transfer them around. And I told people "I don't have good balance so don't make me one of those people leaning out over the edge trying to control something" and then the line got held up and I was on a balance beam. So I'm just standing there, trying not to fall because if anyone falls the whole team gets penalized so I'm trying not to fall and I almost fall and I save myself and then by saving myself I almost fall again, but I recover and I'm steady and I heard someone, I don't know who she was, was back at the starting platform --- she said, "it's not that he doesn't have good balance, it's just that he –" and I didn't hear the rest of what she said, but the fact that they were, people were focusing on me being different and judging me was like "I really don't want to be here. I put up with enough of this in high school, I don't want it in college."

Patrick described this first social experience in JBC as disheartening as he felt like he had already ruined his chance to reinvent himself and earn friends. Before he could even demonstrate his skills or smartness, he felt that his peers had already rejected his attempt to be the smart, capable one. Yet, he concluded his story by noting the positive effects of JBC, discussed in the next finding.

Differently than the rest of the participants, Jeremy fluctuated between saying one should not base one's identity on what other people think and admitting that he has "a problem caring what other people think about me." He shared that he once quit a job where the manager kept re-training him and doubting his ability to perform tasks well. In his academic life, he said that peers do not affect him because he doubts himself more than any other person could. When asked to provide an example of a time he doubted himself, he plainly stated all of his accounting class. He does not know how other people thought about his performance in the class as he does not socialize with classmates in and out of class. Jeremy actively challenged any assertion that his family influenced his intelligence identity. Instead, he reiterated that he motivates himself to go to college and to be successful. That being said, he credited his parents and the fact that they moved around often in his childhood for the fact that school held so much importance as going to school was his consistency. Each of the participants' families influenced the foundational development of her/his intelligence identity. Later, real and perceived feedback from and comparison to peers impacted the self-perception of the identity of being the smart one.

Sub-question 1C. What roles do participants report their groups of affiliation (i.e., academically related activities, non-academic activities, learning communities, etc.) play in the saliency of the label of intelligence?

Theme 4: Connections with JBC professors and similarly driven peers reinforced intelligence identity. The five participants discussed the importance of feeling included in JBC. Membership in JBC allowed participants to interact regularly with

faculty, staff, employers, and similarly intellectual peers. These interactions reinforced participants' smartness identity.

For Rachel, JBC meant recognition for her intelligence and achievement. She had prepared herself to not get into honors after a difficult first semester, but it felt good to be in JBC on the basis of her achievements and potential.

> I knew I was a high-achieving student, I knew I was smart, I knew I could do it and being invited to JBC just sort of helped that. Knowing that I was getting recognition for my grades, my ACT score, that kind of thing, that gave me more confidence.

Rachel reported feeling supported by her similar-level peers, differently than she may have if she had a more diverse group of affiliation.

Henry pointed out that he skipped the company site visit portion of the learning community course which this researcher, his instructor, had not realized. By the end of the semester when this visit occurred, he was discouraged that he lacked the emotional intelligence to interact with others. Henry classified JBC as a collection of "people who were relatively active on campus, who were more involved, people who would give back to the campus or something like that." When I asked if this affected his perception of his smartness, he clarified that no, it did not affect his perception of his smartness, but it did affect his holistic view of his intelligence identity now that he could better appreciate his competencies in the different facets of intelligence.

Theme 5: Co-curricular involvement and peers played a significant role in identity negotiation. Four of the five participants discussed the importance of out-of-class activities in reflecting or challenging their intelligence identity. Henry did not have significant involvement out of the classroom because his parents stressed the importance of putting academics first. On the other side of the spectrum, Rachel and Stephen were

very involved in high school. Each tried to continue this in college, but have now decreased their involvement in order to concentrate on academics.

Stephen was more involved in extracurricular activities when he was in high school than now in college. He explained, "I just feel like everything goes back to high school where I was constantly doing things, whether I wanted to or not." I asked for clarification if he meant that his parents had made him be involved. He responded, "Um, they wanted me to stay really involved in high school whether it be sports or clubs. I just felt like it not having a complete structure, having a lot of time in my day just makes me feel lazy." We talked about his current involvement and he mentioned his fascination with the Japanese culture; specifically, he loves anime and card games. Watching and playing these items with others and by himself constitute his social activity. He did not tie connections between this involvement and his academic performance or intelligence identity, but explained that these are his distractions from concentrating on school. Stephen was able to postpone affects to his identity of being the smart one by avoiding activities which called it into question. The role involvement played in his identity was as a distraction from and postponement of thinking about how he defines himself.

Rachel admitted that her level of involvement her first year of college was problematic for her academic success. In high school, her identity of being the smart one included the ability to juggle a large number of activities while still achieving good grades. In college, this formula led to subpar academic performance, forcing her to renegotiate her identity. In the last year, being involved in the sorority created peer-reinforcement of who she is – people tell her that she is a good person and they love her for who she is. This validated her as a good person when her academic performance

failed to meet her internal criteria for success. Her identity of being the smart one became less salient as her reputation for being a good person increased.

Jeremy is already achieving leadership in his involvement and this reinforced his intelligence status. Jeremy was not able to get highly involved outside of academics when he was growing up due to moving around often in a military family. Yet, now in college, Jeremy's role as a the president of an academic fraternal organization and member of an academic-focused student group validate his identity of being smart in the fact that he is able to manage his leadership with his coursework.

On the topic of his involvement, Patrick shared the story of a recent missionary trip. He had been assigned the task of taping up boxes full of items to send abroad for a charity. When I asked how his identities played into this trip, Patrick shared that his spatial reasoning skills allowed him to speed up production by repacking the boxes for optimal efficiency before taping them shut. His peers noticed that he was "intelligent in the puzzle solving department" and reinforced his role in the group. Together with the group's shared identity of Christianity, Patrick felt energized and happy with these people. The recognition as someone who was good at something helped validate that he was the smart one, the best at the task. He shared that this recognition made him feel more included as one of the group.

Sub-question 1D. How does the process of talking about the self-label of high intelligence affect participants' identity?

Theme 6: Identities can fluctuate in saliency as a result of new contexts. As these students navigated the academic and social environments of college, each balanced the perceptions of others with their own self-knowledge. This resulted in some saliency

shifts as different pieces of their self-image were called to the front of their minds. The participants shared during the process of these interviews on the ability of identities to fluctuate within different contexts.

Patrick saw being smart as the overarching goal of all academic interactions in high school, but that it is now less integral (though still important) compared to other forces. Patrick felt he needed to be invited to honors or else he admitted it would have shaken his foundation.

> Honors program was a given because I had been taking tons of Honors courses in high school, I got a 35 on the ACT, I was just like, "oh, yeah, I'm definitely getting into the Honors program because I'm an Honors student, I have to get into the Honors program, that's just what I do." That's all I've done for the last four years of my life is been an Honors student who's ahead of everybody else, who's better than everybody else so that's why – well, I guess it wasn't necessarily a given, I wasn't thinking of it as a given, but I was thinking that my wanting to get in and expecting to get in was, because I'm arrogant.

Being in Honors was core to his identity. Patrick says that saliency of intelligence identity depends on context; for example, if a person is trying to party all the time versus trying to be CEO of Fortune 500 company. He described,

> Depending on where you are and where you want to go, it depends. …if you are, you know, a partier, a frat boy who goes out and parties half the week then intelligence is not that important because I mean, you're not really headed anywhere great in your life. Being smart or not doesn't really matter that much. Whereas if you're somebody who cares about getting a decent-paying job or if you're someone whose goal is to be the CEO of a Fortune 500 company by 40 years old or something then in that case intelligence is important. So, depending on what clique you're in, where you want to go determines whether intelligence is important for your circumstances in college.

He says that he still values intelligence highly, just not as highly as his desire for social intelligence, now that he has decided to go into ministry. He clarified that

> straight-up intelligence in terms of book smarts is not as important to me because I'm willing to sacrifice some of that in order to get the social intelligence that I need to have a successful social life and to enjoy my life. … I go toward transferring to the other institution because the religious aspect and my faith is becoming more important to me and as spirituality becomes more important, intelligence is becoming less important to me…. It's being replaced by faith.

Patrick repeated this point several times in that passage, reiterating "I still value you it [Patrick gets very close to recorder] hear me on that: I still value intelligence. Highly. [He moves away.] Just not as highly. So it's not as important." Patrick's intelligence identity has shifted in salience to allow for new priorities.

From Stephen's point of view, the people around you tell you how smart you are and you have to choose whether to base your perception off them or stay true to your own perception. This came to a fore in his discussion of the differences between Home Stephen and School Stephen. From my standpoint as his former instructor and as the instrument of data collection in this study, I could sense this difference. As a student in JBC, he gave off the same quiet, studious vibes as he described School Stephen, but when talking about home, it was clear that he is very laidback yet is also a joking procrastinator. Stephen understands that he embodies different versions of who he is in different contexts.

Rachel explained that the saliency of her identity is directly impacted by threats to her identity. When somebody calls it into question, it brings the identity to the front of her mind and she is forced to decide whether or not to adjust her self-perception. She gave the following example:

> when something like that happens, when something that puts my identity in jeopardy, I think, if that makes sense. Like if I get to that point where somebody is defining me "oh, you're a woman, you can't do that" or "you

> don't have a strong relationship with God" is NO, that'll change, that'll put it in perspective for me.
> Amy: Change the identity or change the saliency?
> Rachel: Change the saliency. I mean, like I'm sure there are things that I'm not aware of that are personal to me that are in the moment type thing. Like if something happened then in that moment I would reflect on it and I would know "oh, this is what Amy was talking about."

Rachel continued to reflect on the saliency of her identities and added that these challenges have changed the saliencies while also strengthening her self-identity. She is now surer who she is as a result of questioning what is important.

Jeremy expressed in his first interview that he felt strongly that his identity around intelligence should not change in college compared to high school because he should not be comparing himself to others. When I asked why he thought some people do compare themselves to others, he explained, "I think that people who are more concerned about themselves and if other people compare to them are more self-consumed and more worried about that than maybe their future." In his second interview, Jeremy opened up more and explained that caring what other people think is one of his challenges because as much as he tries not to let it bother him, it still does. At that point, he was able to articulate that his self-efficacy decreases sharply at the beginning of each semester and it takes a few weeks of achieving good grades to build up his confidence once more. The process of talking about identities helped him move past reacting defensively to my questions and give more thoughtful answers.

Henry brought a different lens to his intelligence identity. I asked him whether he believed his intelligence identity is related to the process of his ethnic identity exploration. He responded in the following way:

> Um, well, I'd say just the way most Asian parents raise their children it's very strict and they're very pushing for you to be good at the sciences,

> math and such so I'd say my logical background and my math proficiency comes from that. Currently, I'd say not so much, but in high school it'd be like "oh, you're Asian, you're good at math." But I feel like in college, the gap closes a lot which I like.

When asked how his being smart would place in a ranking of his categories, Henry stated that it would be somewhat high, but he would call it intelligence as this term incorporates all types of smartness. He clarified, "I'd say maybe age first. Um, maybe gender second, culture third, smart being maybe fourth or fifth." I asked him why smart places there and he struggled to give me an answer, eventually arriving at the decision that his identities are split "half-and-half where some are so important I can't rank them while others are less important." He spoke about how his intelligence identity fluctuates in saliency as a result of different identities shifting into greater importance based on his environments.

Theme 7: Answering these questions about identities is difficult, but helpful in renegotiating identity. This research process included an information-packed first interview and a reflection-packed second interview. The process of self-reflection about their intelligence identity was new to these participants; inherent in that newness was difficulty answering the questions with confidence. Yet, all shared that they found worth in the exercise.

The five students which participated in the study met the goals of this study through their self-selection that they identified with the exploration of their intelligence identity over the past year of school. Within the interviews, the researcher asked each why she/he had volunteered. Three of the five explained simply that someone had asked and it seemed interesting. One, an honors JBC student, reported that the study of exploration of intelligence identity fit with his state of mind when he replied as he was

conscious of this identity changing. The last participant did not answer the question, instead providing additional information on a different question.

Stephen referred to the process of talking about his intelligence identity as going outside his comfort zone, trying to answer questions to which he did not know the answers challenged his perception of his intelligence level. Although he showed no physical or verbal signs of agitation or discomfort, he expressed concern about the validity of his intelligence identity. Regarding the process, Stephen said it has been:

> difficult because I've never really thought about it. I've always, my parents have always said I was smart but they never expanded on why. It just seems like I've thought of myself as smart, but I never knew the reason to it. … In parts, it's made me doubt my smartness either because I don't understand the question well enough or just can't really formulate an answer to it and makes it seem like oh, it just doesn't feel very intelligent if I can't do it. But then in other parts, on the other side of the spectrum I can easily talk about it so it's just, I don't know, both.

Stephen also shared that he thought the process was worth it in order to make him better prepared for future circumstances where he would otherwise avoid confronting the issue.

Jeremy was the only person who was able to immediately provide his categories of social identities: "I'm 19 almost 20, I'm a male. I'm, depending on how broadly you get in ethnic origin, I'm White and I'm European – Eastern-European. Straight and I'm - I've got severely poor vision, I guess you could call that disability." When I tried to ask him the flexibility in the saliency of his labels, he challenged the idea that changing the saliency of your identity is a healthy reaction. He explained that he does not think of himself as smart because "in the scheme of things, it really doesn't matter. I mean, everyone's going to live their life." He states his smartness as a fact, but he tries not to let it factor into how he sees himself. As he says, "I mean it doesn't really matter. I'm learning." From his perspective, he is the same person, regardless of how others see him

and the process of talking about it frustrated him since it forced him to think about himself in a way that could end in a changed self-perception.

Patrick similarly struggled to expound upon his identities, sharing that he does not know what it is to not be himself. This turned into a recitation of labels as well as expression of hesitancy because he felt responsible for making sure my sample was not too limited. When I informed him that I was looking for depth not breadth, richness not generalizability, he tried to give me as many categories as he could in effort to be helpful.

Patrick challenged me that you cannot rank identities because if any of them changed, he would not be himself. In its totality, Patrick called this process, "annoying, fun, relaxing, [and] entertaining." When asked if he foresaw the opportunity to reflect on his identities again, he sarcastically replied not unless his new institution has another Amy to ask him to participate in one of these studies again. He enjoyed the process of talking about a topic which is not often brought up in conversation and was sad that he does not normally get the opportunity to reflect on his identity because it clarified his views on himself.

When asked if she considers herself to be smart now after the process of this interview, Rachel responded, "I mean, not brilliant, but I'm still smart – *I* define myself as a smart person, but am not necessarily – I'm not dumb, obviously, but I'm not a genius – I don't have a 4.0, but I'm not dumb." I asked if she finds herself defining herself by her GPA and she admitted that she is working on it. She knows that she needs to stop stressing, and

> putting on that front that I am a smart, you know, like, I need to stop putting that front that I'm not a smart person. I need to say "I have a 2.9 GPA, cool! That doesn't mean I'm a different person, I'm still a good person."

Many of Rachel's answers to questions about her identity revolved around her self-image as a good person.

In her larger process of reestablishing a pattern of academic success, Rachel shared that she dislikes talking about her grades and other academic performance indicators (i.e., in this interview) because she feels like she says "the same things every time I talk to somebody about it, it never changes…. Talking about it, there's more things to say, I'm an open book", but she does not feel she can be open with feelings and concerns. She said that the interview process was helpful but not sufficient in helping her work through her intelligence identity renegotiation.

Henry was able to initially provide his social categories of sex, gender, and age. Through talking it out, Henry then defined his ethnic origin and nationality. The conversation on his ethnic origin and nationality were framed by his intelligence identity. The MMDI suggests that social constructs like racism increase saliency for certain labels. In this way, others' expectations of his intelligence as a result of his ethnic origin and nationality framed his identity as the smart one in high school. In the second interview, Henry seemed to enjoy talking about why talking about his identities was difficult. I asked how he believed he could get to know his identities better. He responded,

> I think a big part of that comes from maturity, the, introspectiveness, thinking about yourself, thinking about those things. And another one would be other people, others around you. There's a quote that I like that says the two most important people in your life are the people who like you for the right reasons and the people that hate you for the right reasons. And the two worst people in your life are the people who like you for the wrong reasons and the people that hate you for the wrong reasons.

I questioned what this meant to him and he responded,

> It's just that the first part says is that criticism is very important, objective criticism can help you grow as a person and unfounded flattery is bad. You know, it's your own self. [These people] see you for your positives –
> Amy: And appreciate your negatives.
> Henry: Exactly. Or, more like take away your negatives. […] point out your negatives and allow you to, obviously the people that hate you for your wrong reasons are…
> Amy: Worthless. [Both laugh]

For Henry, the process of self-identity is socially impacted. Critically discussing his identities through this interview process and in other environments shapes his identity renegotiation. Yet, he expressed expectations that he will improve through exploration and maturation.

Conclusion

This research study explored the important elements of development of identity as the smart one reported by second-year undergraduates. Now in college, these five students reflected on their identities, specifically around intelligence. Seven themes emerged from the data around their definition of smartness, how intelligence identity is created, challenged, and reinforced by family and peers, the effect of the Jumpstart Business Community on these students as well as other involvement outside of the classroom, and the fluctuating saliency of their identities. In the next chapter, I will explain what these findings mean for those who work with these students inside and outside the classroom and ideas for future research.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore the important elements of the intelligence identity of formerly accelerated learners who are now second-year undergraduates. Five participants were interviewed twice around one main research question and four sub-questions. The main question was what are the important elements reported by second-year undergraduates formerly labeled as the smart one in high school in managing their multiple identities once transitioned into higher education at a research intensive institution's business college? In this chapter, I will discuss the significance of this study and provide recommendations for practice and future research. I begin with a short review of the findings presented in Chapter 4.

Summary of Findings

The main elements participants reported in managing their multiple identities were (a) the process of redefining intelligence in college compared to earlier in their lives; (b) impact on intelligence identity from family, friends, classmates, and groups of affiliation; and (c) the effect of talking about intelligence. Participants described college intelligence as being more than raw intelligence. The emphasis on effort and skills in achieving smartness in college surprised several participants. Consequently, lack of preparation and study skills created challenges to the participants' intelligence identities. Additionally, social comparison among peers affected participants' intelligence identities. Participants compared themselves to peers in residence halls and groups of affiliation to see the effort others put in to achieve the same or better results. Most participants found talking about identities and specifically trying to rank intelligence in comparison to other

self-identities challenging yet rewarding. Each exhibited interest in continuing the conversation as they gained more experiences, yet none foresaw natural opportunities for the level of self-reflection found in participation in this study.

These five participants all started college with the same experience: Jumpstart Business Community; yet, each has ended up on a different life trajectory. Although this research achieved its exploratory goal, these five participants may not be representative of the population of high-achieving students or college students in general. Future research may delve further into how college students negotiate their intelligence identity.

Discussion

Question 1A: intelligence in college vs. earlier in life. The participants reported that the definition of smartness shifted from high school to college, from reputation-driven to outcomes-dependent. Students who had it easy in high school did not need to develop study skills. The smart students could put in minimal effort and still succeed. Yet, when achieving good grades took more effort in college than in high school, the coping strategies for how to handle challenges were not present. This is supported by research on college students in general and honors students, specifically in relationship to perfectionism (Luycks et al., 2008) which suggests high expectations on the self as a result of past high performance manifests into higher levels of disappointment in themselves when they place high, but not high enough.

The results to this first sub-question reflect the literature on perfectionism and locus of control. Patrick and Stephen placed the responsibility intrinsically for not achieving at the same levels in college as in high school. They called it laziness or lack of motivation to apply the greater level of effort needed to excel in their courses. On the

opposite side of the spectrum, Jeremy and Rachel placed the locus of control on external factors. They struggled to catch up to peers who appeared to be more academically ready for college. The focus of this study on students who had proven high achievement earlier in life yet are now second-tier in accelerated learning programs adds to the literature on locus of control as researchers can see that inclusion in this group did not mitigate the causal factors for this challenge.

Questions 1B and 1C: roles of social partners and groups of affiliation. Parents and other family members had significant influence in shaping the students' foundational definition of smartness and created the structure by which the students became high-achieving in high school. Additionally, JBC and other co-curricular activities confirmed or challenged the identity of being the smart one.

For many of the participants, expectations were set early in their education that they would be high-achieving and they met those goals in high school without feeling too much sacrifice. The participants' descriptions of their parents' roles in their lives supports Gockenbach (1989) which outlined the correlations between parents' characteristics and gifted students' characteristics. The purpose of this study was to explore the important elements that influence negotiation of intelligence identity and it supports the idea that families do impact high-achievement through the structures and expectations set throughout life.

Once these students went to college, the participants' answers for how they knew they were smart revolved around social comparison to peers in the classroom and/or JBC. In high school, the participants reported that peers would talk about them as smart. Participants also compared their performance to peers in an effort to evaluate their own

intelligence. The effect of friends' group of affiliation on the student's own intelligence identity was discussed in Holland (2012). This study expands upon that point to suggest that not only is it important for the college students to have friends which reflect their achievement level, but also that interaction with those above their level magnifies the impact of being part of a second-tier academic program.

JBC and other involvement expanded for the participants the definition of smartness beyond just academic intelligence to include social/emotional intelligence. For the non-honors students, Rachel and Jeremy, inclusion in this second-tier of accelerated learners provided the positive effect of clear equals with whom to compare themselves. Yet, for Patrick and Henry as introverts, the emphasis in JBC on "who you know" in combination with "what you know" was overwhelming. This was more of a challenge than reinforcement of intelligence. When their definition of intelligence expanded past academic achievement, these two students discovered that they did not have what it took to do a business career. According to Amit and Gati (2013), this elimination of potential options constitutes positive movement toward identification of future career success.

Helping students figure out that they can still be smart, just in some other area, helps them maintain their intelligence identity through a refocusing on their own definition of what it means to be smart. This relates to the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNSLAE) interview developed by Baxter Magolda and King (2007). The current study based the interview protocol off of this model in order to allow the participants room in the interview to contribute their definitions of what is important to share toward the research goals. Instead of stating the theoretical framework for the participants and biasing their truth-creation toward those parameters, students were

encouraged to define their own importance. Whereas Baxter Magolda and King (2007) focused on liberal arts education, this study added to the literature with an exploration of the specific identity around being the smart one. In their reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity, Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) noted that "high saliency of a social identity in relationship to the core does not always imply positive self-perceptions of that identity" (p. 14). This was evident in this study as the participants provided conflicting accounts of their self-esteem around the renegotiation of their intelligence identity. Increased attention on the intersections of identities and the student's personal definition for her or his identities may help student affairs professionals support each student's unique needs, dependent on their involvement in the classroom, socially, and in co-curricular activities.

Involvement outside the classroom took many forms among the five participants. Astin (1999) and his involvement theory suggests that involvement begets better engagement with the campus. For some of the participants, involvement detracted from academic success. This study adds to the literature on involvement in its both positive and negative effects on academic success. Parents, peers, and affiliation groups contribute different roles in the participants' identity renegotiation. Parents set the foundational definition of what it means to be smart. Peers clarified their identity of being the smart one through social comparison. Affiliation groups provide the support through the transition to challenge and/or validate their identities, including of being smart.

Question 1D: Talking about intelligence. Across all five participants, talking about their intelligence identities and the fluctuating saliency of their full collection of

identities was new and challenging. Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) emphasized the movement toward the students using their own voices to decide their identities, instead of using the words or assumptions of others. Compared to this literature, these second-year undergraduates are appropriately still at the beginning steps toward creation of their self-narrative.

The participants reported that talking about identities – more specifically, trying to rank intelligence in comparison to other self-identities – was challenging yet rewarding. Several noted the difficulty laid in the fact that this was the first time they were asked to think about these topics. This study supports the assertion that talking about their identities helps students move toward self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007).

Implications

In this study, I focused on the significant factors related to students' negotiation of intelligence identity. This study suggests that participants had smartness as part of their identity although it was largely unconscious in high school. In the state of this study, small towns far outnumber cities. This means there are valedictorians and salutatorians from classes of just a few dozen alongside those who graduated 25th out of hundreds. When the students in this study moved from high school to college they were faced with experiences that led many of them to question their smartness identity and take a more active role making sense of these identities. Educators may need to be more aware of the possible saliency of an identity related to smartness when working with students. Additionally, educators may need more education about approaches for supporting

students through meaning making of identities as the students in this study faced some transitions from high school to college.

Another implication is the possibilities for shaping identities through interactions with peers and affiliation groups. Understanding that the role of the parents is central in many students' pre-college sense of smartness is important. Also, educators need to understand the potential for peers and groups of affiliation in college to influence the smartness identity in both positive and negative ways. Students like Jeremy, whose external label of being the smart one changed when he was not invited to the honors program, may benefit from affiliation with academically focused organizations. Taking a leadership role in an organization of high-achieving individuals may support that internal drive to self-identify as smart.

Finally, talking about intelligence identities may be an important element for students who might otherwise not have opportunities to explore their smartness identities. These are the students who were identified as high-achieving and full of potential; if educators fail to validate this identity of being smart, the cost to the individual may be decreased self-efficacy and higher education loses what that student may have been able to contribute to the classroom and the institution if she/he had been supported.

Recommendations for Practice

Those who work with students in a higher education setting may not have the time or financial resources to give individualized attention to all learners with whom they interact. Yet, this research raises several recommendations for future practice.

This study supports the recommendation that practitioners of first-year experience courses utilize a variety of classroom facilitation methods in order to allow all students

the opportunity to be successful. Several of the students noted the role of strengths-based reflection in helping them negotiate their identities. Within the context of the specific course, educators may use a mixture of written and oral discussion prompts to ask students to consider what elements make them good at what they excel and what barriers accompany these strengths (Clifton, Anderson, & Schreiner, 2006). Even without the Gallup Strengths education system, conversations about perceived or actual weakness areas may help students learn to see "weaknesses as obstacles to be managed, skills to be learned, or knowledge to be acquired" (p. 77). This may be achieved through case-study based learning, which allows the students to externalize their values in order to better understand their construction of truth. For those who are not comfortable or do not yet have the self-knowledge to talk about their identities, this case study may help them develop the language to describe what is important to them.

When students visit an academic advisor worried about a B+ on an exam, the advisor may be prone to respond with assurances that this grade will not negatively impact their academic success or future chances at scholarships, jobs, or graduate schools. Yet, the issue is not the B+; the issue is the impact of a B+ on her/his identity of being the smart one and a more general sense of self. Taking the time to understand the student's personal criteria for success may create a more supportive, validating environment (Pizzolato, 2003). Allowing the student to process internally and externally aids in the negotiation of identity and development of self-authorship.

Each of these participants spoke about the role of others in negotiating self-perception of her/his intelligence identity. Higher education research usually speaks to the interventions performed by faculty and/or staff. This research suggests the need to

create environments for peers to foster each other's identity development. This may exist in living-learning communities as in this study, yet any group setting which encourages intentional peer feedback may ease the transition to and through college among all of the identity renegotiations which may be occurring. This does require coordination by staff and faculty, yet the power of peers may be harnessed for positive development, decreasing the individual sessions students may need to work through personal challenges.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study demonstrated that even those who were academically high-achieving in high school can still struggle academically when they come to college. The fact that none of these five people emerged from their first year of undergraduate with their intelligence identity unchanged suggests that development of intelligence identity is an active phenomenon worth further study. Intelligence identity may not be salient for every student, but for the students who had saliency in this identity they experienced dissonance, frustration, some academic failures, and sense of desire to withdraw from school because of challenges to their intelligence identity. Knowing more about this identity and students' meaning making of it could help educators support their persistence and success in college.

Due to the constraints of this study, a convenience sample was used from this researcher's former students. Future research could recruit participants from a more diverse population of students, both those labeled gifted in high school and those not labeled gifted to explore the negotiation of intelligence identity in college after high school. Additionally, as was an initial idea for this study, research could focus on

students who were labeled gifted and/or were accelerated learners and wanted to be in a university honors program but were not accepted. This would allow the researcher to gain a clearer understanding of the specific effects on identity of not being accepted into a top tier academic program. Also, best practices could be identified for supporting students' renegotiation of intelligence identity.

One additional way to gain a richer understanding of this population is to do a chronological study at the beginning of the first year of the students' college career (i.e., before the college environment can test their identity), at the beginning of the second semester, and perhaps additional times until graduation of college. This interview structure makes the assumption that these students would graduate from college which may not be the case.

Conclusion

This research study was conducted to explore the identity negotiation of college students after their transition from high school. Participants reported that the definition of being the smart one changed in college compared to earlier in their lives as a result of influences from family, friends, peers in the classroom, and groups of affiliation. This study focused on the identity of being smart; the classroom is ripe for both challenges and validations of smartness. Recommendations for practice include strengths-based framework within the classroom, using case studies to help students develop the language to describe and negotiate their identities. Recommendations for future research include correlational research over the full transition of high-achieving students into, through, and out of college and the renegotiation of the identity of being smart.

Participants reported the following elements important in managing their intelligence identities. They went through the motions of knowing they were smart in high school without thinking about it, but now they have to think about it – the identity of being smart is more salient in college than it was in high school as the definition has changed. Whereas families set the foundation for their intelligence identity, peers and groups of affiliation like the Jumpstart Business Community and other co-curricular involvement validate or challenge their internal identity of being the smart one based on how others externally label them. Lastly, the process of talking about their intelligence identity created additional saliency and helped clarify the occurring renegotiation process.

This study achieved the goal of exploring the self-reported important elements in managing the identity of intelligence, yet future research is needed to clarify which experiences were most impactful so that higher education and student affairs practitioners can support students. This research suggested that the renegotiation of identity around intelligence created emotional and social challenges in the first two years of the participants' undergraduate career. For these students, who were included in a second-tier affiliation group for high-achieving students, explicit validation of their intelligence may have been provided. Yet, the fact that this process was still evident for these students suggests that the larger population of students experiencing this transition may be in need of the same and more support. If educators fail to capture the potential of these formerly accelerated learners and high-achieving students, we all lose out on the short- and long-term accomplishments these individuals may have achieved at the institution and within society.

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Appendix

Appendix A: First Recruitment Email

First email to participant pool

Hello [name],
I hope your second year at UNL is off to a great start! As you may remember from BSAD 101 last fall, I am a Master's student in CEHS studying Educational Administration, Student Affairs Administration. For my thesis, I am studying the identity exploration process of students who were in accelerated (e.g. Honors, IB, AP, etc.) courses in high school, but not necessarily in the Honors Program, here at UNL.
As an alumnus of the Business Connections Community last year, I request your participation in this research study. The time requirement would be two, 30-45 minute interviews over the course of one month. My goal is to do the first interview at the end of this semester and the second at the beginning of next semester, both here at UNL.
Your decision whether to participate will not affect your ability to continue to visit with me per my Graduate Assistant/Academic Adviser role in the College of Business Administration, though you can request to meet with one of the other ten advisers if you do not wish for these roles to cross. As a reminder, my role as your instructor/coordinator of your learning community ended in May 2013 so the decision whether to participate in this study does not affect your academic status.
If you would like additional information and/or would like to participate, please contact me by email at amyaholland@gmail.com or by phone at (203)313-0774 so that we can arrange time to meet.

Thank you,
Amy Holland

Appendix B: Second Recruitment Email

Follow-up to first participation email to gather more, if needed

Hello [name],
This email is to follow-up on my email on [date] regarding your participation in my Master's thesis research. I am studying the identity exploration process of students who were in accelerated (e.g. Honors, IB, AP, etc.) courses in high school, but not necessarily in the Honors Program, here at UNL.
As an alumnus of the Business Connections Community last year, I request your participation in this research study. The time requirement would be two, 30-45 minute interviews over the course of one month. My goal is to do the first interview at the end of this semester and the second at the beginning of next semester, both here at UNL.
Your decision whether to participate will not affect your ability to continue to visit with me per my Graduate Assistant/Academic Adviser role in the College of Business Administration, though you can request to meet with one of the other ten advisers if you do not wish for these roles to cross. As a reminder, my role as your instructor/coordinator of your learning community ended in May 2013 so the decision whether to participate in this study does not affect your academic status.
If you would like additional information and/or would like to participate, please contact me by email at amyaholland@gmail.com or by phone at (203)313-0774 so that we can arrange time to meet.

Thank you,
Amy Holland

Appendix C: First Follow-Up Email

Follow-up several weeks after first interview

Hello [name],
It was great meeting with you a few weeks ago! As we discussed then, this study has two parts and this email is to plan a time to meet for the second interview. The same considerations are in place: we want to find a semi-quiet place so that my audio recorder can catch our conversation, yet you can choose whichever location on or near campus which is convenient to you.
If I do not receive a response from you, I will assume that you no longer wish to participate. If you are interested, but are currently busy, please let me know and we will arrange to meet some time in the future.
Again, my contact information is (203)313-0774 or amyaholland@gmail.com
Thank you,
Amy Holland

Appendix D: Second Follow-Up Email

Follow-up two weeks after email sent to schedule a second interview

Hello [name],
This email is a follow-up to the email sent on [date]. It was great meeting with you a few weeks ago! As we discussed then, this study has two parts and this email is to plan a time to meet for the second interview. The same considerations are in place: we want to find a semi-quiet place so that my audio recorder can catch our conversation, yet you can choose whichever location on or near campus which is convenient to you.
If I do not receive a response from you within the next two weeks, I will assume that you no longer wish to participate and will not contact you again.
If you are interested, but are currently busy, please let me know and we will arrange to meet some time in the future.
Again, my contact information is (203)313-0774 or amyaholland@gmail.com
Thank you,
Amy Holland

Appendix E: First Interview Protocol

The first several questions focus on your experience before you came to UNL. I will ask about your academic background and your transition to academic life at UNL.

1. Although we got to know each other a bit during your year in the Business Connections Community, I believe it is important not to make the assumption that this means I know *you*. To start off, tell me about yourself by answering the question "Who are you?"
    a. (If more specificity is requested by the student) Tell me about your background and your involvement in high school and at the University?
2. How would you define someone who is "smart" in high school?
    a. Were you "smart" in high school?
    b. What kinds of courses did you take in high school? How "smart" were you compared to your peers in the classroom?
3. What does it mean to "act smart"? Do you feel that you acted the role of a "smart" person in high school?
    a. How important was the role of perceived intelligence in high school?
4. What are your feelings regarding
    a. No invitation to Honors?
    b. Invitation to Business Connections Community?
5. Now in your second year of college, would you say that first year as BCC had an effect on your perception of your own smartness?

The next several questions focus on your definition of who you are as a person.

6. What are your social identities? Social identities include the categories of who you are based on our cultural definitions of age, gender, sex, ethnic origin, race, sexual orientation, ability, etc.
7. How would you define "smart" in college?
    a. How well do you fit this definition?
8. Please provide a situation where you felt your perceived intelligence was particularly important. For some, this may be in a classroom, in a friend group or with family, in an extracurricular activity, or in a job. Please do not feel limited to any situational criteria, but whatever comes to mind.
9. From your perception, how important is the identity of "being smart" in college?
    a. If it helps, how would you rate the identity of being smart from 1 for "not at all important" to 7 for "extremely important"? Please explain.
10. What were some of the challenges or dilemmas you experienced in your identity as "the smart one" when you were transitioning to college?
11. Who were the individuals who reinforced and/or challenged this identity? Tell me about their role in your identity.

Appendix F: Second Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me for a second time to explore deeper your experiences in college.

1. As you think back on our last meeting, is there any information which you thought of after our conversation ended which you want to add?
    a. This can focus on your experiences in high school, your transition to college, the saliency of the label of "being smart," or any other topic which you feel is important for me to consider.
2. As I asked you in our first meeting, how do you define yourself, or, "who are you?" This can be as specific or general as you feel fits your identity.
3. How was the experience of being interviewed on the topic of your "being smart"?
    a. What are your feelings and thoughts about this process?

Appendix G: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

University of Nebraska Lincoln

IRB# 20131113889EX
Date Approved: 11/08/2013
Valid Until: 11/08/2014

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

Participant Informed Consent Form

IRB# 13889

Title: Exploring the Multiple Dimensions of Identity of Formerly Accelerated Learners

Purpose:
This research project will aim to explore the identity exploration process of students formerly enrolled in accelerated academic courses, but who are now not part of the Honors Program. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a UNL student who participated in the Business Connections Community in Fall 2012-Spring 2013. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate in this study.

Procedures:
You will be asked to participate in two interviews: one at the end of the fall semester and the other at the beginning of the spring semester. The interviews will each last 30-60 minutes and will be conducted in a semi-private location at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln City or East campus. The questions within the first interview focus on social identities and the questions within the second interview focus on the experience of talking about social identities. The interviewer intends to audio-record these interviews. Please check the box below to indicate your consent to this portion of the study. Audio recordings will be destroyed after May 2014.

Benefits:
There are no direct benefits to you as a research participant. Indirect benefits may include the opportunity to reflect upon your identity as a student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Confidentiality:
Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants, the learning community, the College, and the University. The data will be stored on a password-protected flash drive and will only be seen by the investigator and thesis advisor(s) during the study. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings, but the data will be reported as aggregated data. You retain the option of choosing to meet with any of the ten advisers in the College of Business Administration Undergraduate Programs Office, regardless of your participation in this study.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or, you may contact the investigator(s) at the phone numbers below. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Freedom to Withdraw:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate, skip any questions, or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

141 Teachers College Hall / P.O. Box 880360 / Lincoln, NE 68588-0360 / (402) 472-3726 / FAX (402) 472-4300

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Participant:

☐ I give consent to be audio-recorded for this study. ☐ I do not give consent to be audio-recorded for this study.

_____ _____
Signature of Research Participant Date

Name and Phone number of investigator(s)

Amy Holland, Principal Investigator	Cell: (203)313-0774
Stephanie Bondi, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator	Office (402) 472-8977